The SECOND WOOING of SALINA SUE

RUTH McENERY STUART

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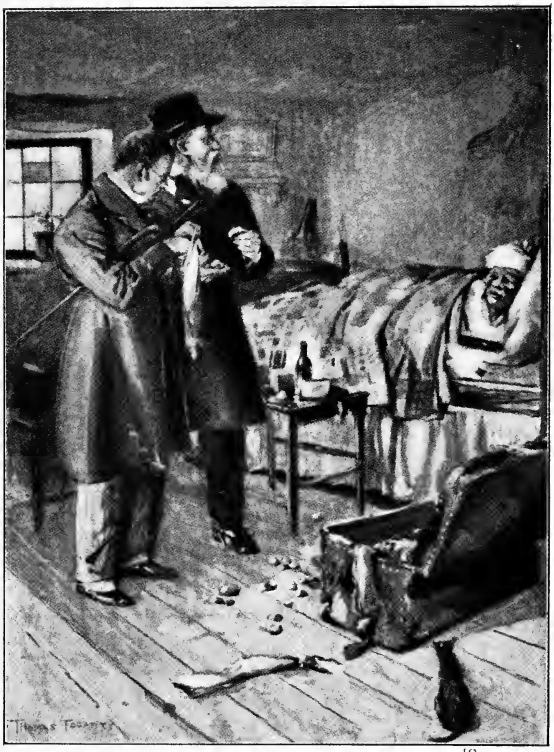

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"'PLEASE COUNT STRAIGHT, MARSTER'"

THE SECOND WOOING OF SALINA SUE

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

RUTH McENERY STUART

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"IN SIMPKINSVILLE" ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KEMBLE AND FROST

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THE SECOND WOOING OF SALINA SUE

THE SECOND WOOING OF SALINA SUE

T all came about through the investigations of the Reverend Saul Sanders, of the Buckeye Conference. Other evangelists had come to the plantation and conducted revivals, adding to the Church militant a goodly number of souls. Then things had gradually settled down in the old ruts. But with the advent of the good brother from the Buckeye Conference there began a new order of procedure.

Brother Saul was a man of power, with that magnetic quality that insures leadership, and his words were those that thunder. After proceeding along the old, emotional

lines until he had worked the people up to the highest pitch of religious enthusiasm, he calmly stepped down from the pulpit, and, assuming the awful and solemn tones of the divinely commissioned, he delivered for their edification what he was pleased to call "a settin' fo'th o' de 'mortal law, accordin' to de dispositions o' de Christian Chu'ch military." It would be vain to attempt to quote with effect from this discourse, which, as he himself freely claimed, "didn't confine itself to no one tex', bein' rich in textes tooken berbatum, word for word, f'om de Holy Scriptures."

The good people of Mount Zion Chapel had many times heard maledictions against the evil-doer hurled from its pulpit, and they were, moreover, familiar with some of the best-known Scriptures bearing upon retributive justice as well as the communion of saints, and it was their wont to listen with becoming equanimity—the equanimity of the presumably innocent—to frequent allusions to such special numbers of the code as were most often ignored. Until the coming of the

apostle Saul of the Buckeye, however, none had had the temerity to particularize as to personal infringement. But Saul was a person of prowess. His lips were strangers to fear; and the gospel, as he dared to expound it, was not only retrospective in its leadings, it was restitutional.

It is a hard word, restitution, and a troublous, and it fell like a bomb upon the hitherto peaceful bosom of the body social of the plantation. Not that its application was particularly wide-spread. But there were cases, well-known cases, whose comfort its enforcement would so palpably disturb that more than two or three or even four persons in the congregation felt, from the time of this preaching, that they were the objects of special notice. Indeed, the turning of turbaned, befeathered, and even of bald heads in special directions was for a time so marked that the august brother felt it necessary to call them to order, which he did by an open rebuke to the effect that those brothers and sisters who found it amusing to turn their

heads to find motes in their brothers' eyes would do well to keep their backs to the congregation to hide the beams in their own. From which it appears that Saul was a man of some humor.

But Saul's chief strength lay in his absolute fearlessness. When he had declared that appropriation of a neighbor's goods without consent was a breaking of the law for which no repentance would avail without restoration of the stolen property, he did not hesitate to shout, while he shot an accusing glance of fire at a chosen offender, "Yas, Brother Jones, I'm a-lookin' at you," or, "Sister Smith, I trus' you's a-listenin'."

This was hard to bear, but it was not the worst. The law of restitution is broad, and it reaches far.

It was not enough—so the man of God proceeded to expound the law—that such of God's people as should in future seek matrimony should find it only at the consecrated hand of the regularly ordained for the holy bestowal, but if some had, either through

blindness or hardness of heart, already achieved it outside the fold, they must hasten to forswear the stolen blessing, and come humbly and penitently forward and receive it with the benediction of the Church. This they were exhorted to do, or to have their names dishonorably erased from the rolls of the sanctuary. And in this application of the ordinance Brother Saul had the temerity to particularize even to the calling of names, loudly challenging the persons indicated to produce certain non-existent documents or else come under the ban.

This was the bomb whose bursting had caused consternation even to the remote corners of the bit of earth which felt the tremors of the explosion — and for good cause.

The conditions of restitution are nearly always difficult and embarrassing. Even in the lesser case of the stolen shoat, for instance, it was sometimes quite impossible— and for obvious reasons. But it was in its bearing upon the more vital issue that he who

essayed its enforcement had need of much wisdom. To confirm at random all existing relations was not always consistent with the teachings of Holy Writ, even as "feebly interpreted" by the humble brother from the Buckeye. Indeed, the simple law of restitution occasionally required the unequivocal undoing of such, and, in some difficult instances, a redoing under embarrassing protests from those most concerned. And again there were instances, simple enough in their outward seeming, that developed annoying features under pressure.

Such, for instance, was the well-known case of cross-eyed Steve and Salina Sue, two quiet and otherwise well-ordered folk who had been for many years in good and regular standing in both Church and community, notwithstanding certain alleged early omissions.

Salina, a portly black woman of forty or thereabouts, was mother to all the happy group of pickaninnies who tumbled over each other in the backyard, and Steve was their

"THE SICK CALF REALIZED IN HIM A BENEFACTOR"

father. Salina as a cook was a genius—which is to say that she seemed to have somewhat the touch of the magician in the practice of the art which she loved. Steve also was endowed beyond the common, but his gift was chiefly for paternity. Indeed, his whole nature had developed for so long along fatherly lines that he seemed to have paternal relations towards all living things on the place. The sick calf realized in him a benefactor, and homeless dogs who chanced along were observed to lift their tails above the courage line as they looked into his kindly face and followed him to troughs of refreshment.

He was a faithful drawer of water and hewer of timber for his much-demanding spouse, and from the arrival of his first-born until now he had been a walker by night and a rocker by day of his ever-increasing family.

But with it all he had been happy. His little, wizened face, twinkling through its original mouldings, was in as broad a grin when he went to the well for water, carrying one of the twins astride each hip, while he balanced

the pail upon his head, as it was during the long, hot afternoons in summer while he rocked the cradle, or fanned the flies off the "teethers" asleep on the patch-work quilt spread for them on the ground under the mulberry-trees outside the kitchen door.

But of late—which is to say for several days before this narrative begins—the little man had worn an air of utter dejection. His old, misfit clothes, which in former days had seemed to impart a spice of the grotesque to his otherwise appealing figure, were shown to be inadequate now. The grotesqueness had lain in his smile, and it was no more. The slope of his narrow shoulders was the slope of the forlorn. Even the little children saw that something was wrong, and followed him curiously with questioning glances as he crossed the yard, and in the evenings when he sat on the end of the porch opposite his spouse, at whose feet it had been his life habit to recline, the dog was seen to go from one to the other before he took sides finally by lying down at Steve's elbow.

Steve and I had been good friends from the first. I soon recognized in him a prodigal and unreckoning contributor of kindly energies on the place; and, besides, he amused me. Indeed, he amused me about equally in all three of his relations—father, husband, and servant. I believe I place them in their proper order. I shall never forget the first time I realized him in character, when he gave me a story and won me completely.

He was crossing the cow-lot, leading a calf to water. A fretting child toddled at his heels, and while he stooped to take him in his arms, another sprang to his shoulders, straddled his neck, and took the ride to the spring mounted in this way, while the little father, struggling with the reluctant calf, staggered beneath his load. He was laughing, though, when I overtook him, and, seeing his face, I laughed too, as I said, jocosely: "Well, old fellow, I suppose you are a sort of factotum, aren't you?" To which he instantly replied, with an amused glance at the child on his arm: "Yas, sir, I s'pec' I is.

I sho does *tote 'em*, for a *fac'*." And I loved him from that minute. The title factotum was his from that day, and if he did not hesitate to interpret it for the benefit of his numerous family, I was pleased to have it so.

But something was wrong now. That was evident. We had realized the shadow for several days, but had not taken it seriously. The domestic landscape needs its clouds to give value to the blue, and there had always been hazy days in the mulberry shadows for little Steve; but the mists had risen in clearing showers. Even an occasional storm cloud that had been spent in the bursting had darkened an occasional day—only for the glorification of evening.

My wife and I sometimes selected such uncertain weather to look through our wardrobes, and we usually found something for Steve first. And so I had done to-day, with a polka tie and a silk hat as results. I had laid them on my bed and strolled out in the yard, intending to call the fellow in to get them when I next should meet him, when, chancing

to glance towards the wood-pile, I saw him drop limply down upon a heap of chips, burying his face in his arms against a pile of logs. The soft rim of his hat hung over his sleeve, and his whole pose betokened utter dejection. As I approached him he lifted his face, and I saw that he had been crying. His eyes were sunken and wet, and his cheeks besmeared with grime from his dusty shirt-sleeves.

I sat down beside him on the log.

"Why, old fellow, what's the matter?" I began, somewhat playfully; but, seeing him quail, I instantly repented, and my next words were in quite another tone. "Never mind, old boy; tell me all about it."

I laid my hand upon his arm as I spoke. This exhibition of sympathy was too much for him. He fell to sobbing.

"I-I-I-I don' know, boss," he began to stammer—"I-I don' know wha' to say to you, b-b-but I mought as well jes *out wid it.* Hit's my ole 'oman—Saliny Sue." He fairly wailed as he spoke her name, giving me the key to his heart-sorrow. "I-I-I don' know

wha' she gwine do—she's so obstropulous an' —an'—an' fickle-minded. I can't keep up wid her."

I was relieved. If this were all, the cloud would soon break—or pass.

"Why, if that's all," I laughed—"if that's all, don't worry; just tell me about it."

The little man wiped his eyes.

"Well, s-sir, hit's dis-a-way," he began—"hit's dis-a-way: Y-y-y-you know, when me an' Saliny Sue, when we married, we—we—we didn't bother nob dy about it. We—we —we jes married private, 'twix' ourselves, an' —an' settled down public, same as heap o' we plantation folks does. An' we been livin' man an' wife now since long 'fo' de s'render—an' dey ain't no yether 'oman to me in all de worl'; an' Saliny Sue she knows it; an' likewise, I'm jes as sho she loves me as good as I loves her. An' de chillen"—at this he was obliged to stop and sob his sorrow out a little —"an' de chillen—look like we 'ain't nuver is knowed which loved 'em de best, her or me. I know I'm sof' on dem wha' favor her,

an' she's clair sp'iled dem three yaller-complected ones wha' got my favor. Dey nuver was no mo' lovin'er couple on Gord's roun' worl' 'n wha' Saliny Sue an' me is; an' now look like—look like''—he was sobbing again —"look like to me, deze heah Chu'ch folks mought find some'h'n' better to do 'n to stir up fam'ly troubles." He drew his sleeve across his eyes and steadied his voice. "You see, dis heah preacher f'om de Buckeye—Brer Saul Sanders—he kin read. An' you know readin'—not sayin' nothin' agin it for sech as kin stan' it—hit clair sp'iles some niggers—jes nachelly turns dey heads. An' dis heah book-reader an' Bible-twister seem like he ain't satisfied to preach 'ligion same as we-all been used to, callin' out mo'ners, an' scrupulatin' on divine grace, an' passin' roun' de hat, an' lettin' saved sinners fin' peace—an' 'tendin' to dey own private business. He ain't satisfied wid dat, but arter stirrin' up de folks tell he got one-half on de mo'ners' bench an' de yether half shoutin', an' a few left-overs standin' roun' de chu'ch

doors smokin' deze heah little paper-kivered ciggars, seem like dat ought to satisfy him—but it don't. Seem like he see a chance to make a little money by upsettin' things right an' lef', an' so he say dat everybody wha' been married accordin' to dey own private jedgment is boun' to step out an' git married over ag'in in de presence o' de congergation, an' wid dat he p'int at me and start a-readin' out Scripture textes to prove it. An' dat's all de trouble. He's a-marryin' 'em off at two dollars a couple cash, ef dey kin raise it, an' ef not, he's takin' it out in anything—from fryin'-size chickens to a split hoe-handle. An' dem wha' refuse, he gwine turn out'n de Chu'ch."

He wiped his face and began fanning himself with his hat; and as it seemed to me that the situation had resolved itself into a question of marriage fee, I laughed a little as I said: "Well, Steve, I'm glad to know that's all. You and Salina shall pay him in cash, and I won't charge it up to you. We'll consider that a little wedding-present." (His

"SHE WON'T HAVE ME."

and Salina's wages were always much overdrawn.) "You and she can go quietly into church on Sunday and have the ceremony over, and be done with it; but I don't see why you—"

This set him sobbing again, more than ever, and now he blubbered: "Da-da-dat what I say to Saliny Sue; b-b-but she—she—she say *she won't have me!*"

His voice went out in a wail.

"Not have you, boy? I don't understand." The little fellow was fully ten years my senior, but there was something so pathetically childlike in his grief that I unwittingly called him boy.

"Yas, sir," he blubbered; "dat what she say. Sh-sh-she say ef she was to study about *gittin' married*, she'd marry *somebody*—not a po' little cross-eyed, scrooched-up someth'n' 'nother like me. Yas, sir; dat wha' she say; an' she stickin' to it. Jes as soon as de preacher tol' her she was requi'ed to marry 'cordin' to de Chu'ch, seem like she took 'n' took a distas'e to me. She always is plegged

me consider'ble about my cross-eyes. When she'd put me to min' de chillen, she'd say Gord set my eyes dat-a-way 'caze I was intended to min' twins—keep my eye on bofe at once-t—an' all sech as dat. Saliny Sue always was a mighty proud lady, an' I know it 'd pleg her to walk up de island o' de chu'ch wid a little slope-shouldered man no purtier 'n I is—an' my bow-legs, too. So I tol' her ef it would ease her min' I'd git a pair o' loose breeches an' a long coat; but 'tain't no use, sh-sh-she wo'n' lis'n to reason, no ways." He was crying again.

"Why, she doesn't mean it, Steve; she's only teasing you," I urged, and, indeed, I felt sure that this was true, though I was angry enough with her for her folly.

"No, sir, she ain't," he wailed. "She ain't puttin' me to no tes'; no, sir, she mean it. She's de high-mindedest 'oman I ever see, Saliny Sue is, an' dat's one thing I always is praised her for—her proudness—an' now she practisin' it ag'in' me.

"Dis ain't de fus' time dis subjec' is been

brung up betwix' us; no, sir. Every now an' ag'in I'd sort o' hint roun' about she an' me gittin' married, outspoke, wid a preacher, an' she'd always turn it off—say ef she ever took a notion to marry she'd git a man wid looks an' behavior, an' all sech as dat; but I ain't nuver paid no 'tention in p'tic'lar. I 'lowed she was havin' her own fun out o' me; but now I see she mean it—my Gord, I see she mean it!

"An' not on'y dat. *Hit's got out on me!* An' one or two o' deze heah low-life niggers dat's a-sp'ilin' for a better joke, dey threatenin' me to turn in an' co't her—an' dey ain't a bit too good to do it, nuther. You know Saliny Sue she's a mighty good-lookin' 'oman to have dat yardful o' chillen, let alone eve'ybody knowin' dat she's been fo'ordained to cook for de angels. She kin git any man she craves. But dey's one thing I wants to state right now. I ain't, to say, built for wrastlin', but I'm a sho hand wid a sling-shot, an' ef one o' dem dare-devils tries to pass Saliny Sue's row o' hen-coops, you'll have me on trial for my life. An' dat's put down in

de Book o' Rivelations — dat's my intention."

I talked with the little fellow for quite an hour, hoping to help him to a more optimistic view of the situation; but seeing that my words counted for little on this plane, I veered a bit.

"Well, I tell you what I should do," I said, finally. "If I were in your place, I should play the independent too. Tell her that you think maybe she's right, and that, when it comes to marrying, you can get lots of pretty young women—which, no doubt, you could," I added, mischievously.

"Oh yas, sir," he interrupted—"yas, sir, I sho could say dat. No less 'n fo' peart-lookin' gals curtsied to me a-Sunday, comin' out o' chu'ch—de same day de news got out on me —an' one gal—one gal, she even axed me is I choosed my company for de bobbecue yit—which I consider no less 'n a clair insult, an' she knowin' me an' all my fam'ly. Yas, sir."

It was hard for me to keep my countenance,

the picture of the little fellow in the new rôle was so absurd.

"Well, and what did you say to her?" I asked.

And now, for the first time, he grinned.

"Oh, I didn't tell her nothin' in p'tic'lar. Of co'se I couldn't let her outdo me in manners, an' she a lady, an' so—an' so I jes curtsied back, mannerly, an' presented her wid de flower I had in my coat collar, an'—"

"And what were you doing with a flower in your coat collar, I'd like to know?" I laughed outright at this. But Steve was quite serious.

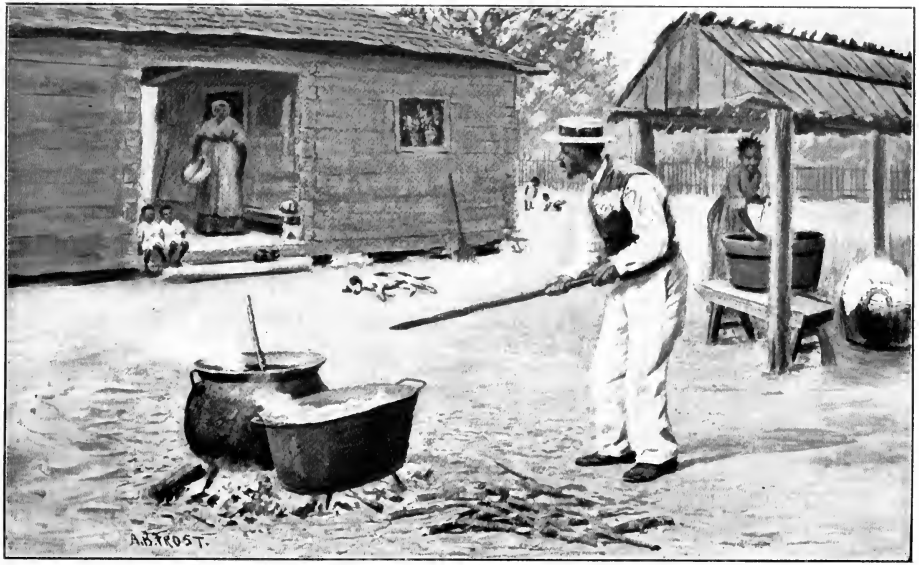
"Well, sir"—he spoke in an even voice—"I b'lieve in every man dressin' accordin' to his station. D'rec'ly Saliny Sue united wid de preacher to declare dat I was a single man, I stepped out an' twis' off de bigges' chrysanthe'um on de yaller bush, an' I stuck it in my collar, an' walk out in her presence—yas, sir. Of co'se I was des a-devilin' 'er, an' it was my intention to present it to de lady o' my heart in de co'se o' de evenin'; but Saliny

Sue she ac' so bove-ish an' biggoty dat, somehow, long as I been knowin' her, I didn't have de courage to walk up an' present her wid dat chrysanthe'um. So I lef' it in my collar jes for spite, and she seen me when I give it to Nancy, too; an' I was glad of it—on'y she was so mad she whupped de baby, an' he not doin' a thing. Dat was de on'ies' thing I hated."

He stopped talking here for a while, and seemed to be reflecting. But presently, looking down at himself deprecatingly, he said, slowly, "Of co'se, ef I'm boun' to do it, I'll start out an' cot' 'er ag'in, b-b-but look like I 'ain't got no fitten clo'es, sca'cely—all dem you gimme she knows by heart, an' dey purty well wo'e out, anyhow. You 'ain't got nair ole pair o' white breeches, is you, marster—or maybe a pair wid a plaid pattern on em, please, sir? Lucy, our ol'es' gal, she's toler'ble handy wid her needle, an' she'll git 'er ma to show her how to cut 'em down for me. Saliny Sue she love to see a man in white—I often heerd 'er sesso—so ef you got air pair o' linen ducks—"

It seems to me yet, as I recall it, although it all happened many years ago, that I have never seen a more pathetic little figure than that of the diminutive rejected husband, Steve, during the fortnight following my interview with him at the wood-pile. Arrayed in second-hand clothes much too large for his slim figure, although they were more or less taken in at some points by the dutiful daughter Lucy, and sometimes wearing a flower upon his breast, he followed the lady of his life about the place in the performance of some eager service. Occasionally he carried a baby in his arms, but more often, in respect to his courting-clothes, he led the little ones by the hand in these days. He was courting his old wife again with the ardor that years of devotion had kept warm, and he brought to the task all the arts he knew. Indeed, he even summoned to his aid some that he did not know, and was constrained to borrow, as, for instance, the composing of certain love-verses, for whose form the writer of this pitiful little

comedy is responsible, and into which he tried to infuse a devotion so loyal and sincere as to dignify the novel service. Most of these "pomes" were casually brought into the body of certain prose effusions which he frankly called "love-letters," written up to the rhyming-point literally by his own dictation, and, barring the fact that there should be in them no allusion to any family relations—he declared that she should be co'ted same as any fresh gal—he left me quite free. And as I knew that the little fourteen-year-old daughter, Lucy, would have to read them to her mother, I was always conscious of a certain educational responsibility in the matter. In the beginning of sorrows these missives came into being about every three or four days, but they soon repeated themselves daily. This is the way of the impetuous lover, it is true, and could hardly have obtained in the situation but for the tension of circumstances. Imminent loss is one of the surest magnifiers of values, glorifying the threatened possession even beyond its intrinsic merit perhaps.



"'WALK RIGHT IN AN' TECK OFF DEM BROGANS'"

During this period of hopeful and timed probation the little husband saw the great wife-mother-woman of his life as an incarnation of blessedness. He was a mighty serious lover these days. And, for the first time in the history of his kindly life, he was occasionally a petulant father. Things were hard for him sometimes, as, for instance, when the twins sat and grinned at him when Salina ordered him to "walk right in an' teck off dem brogans," and he was constrained to obey in silence. It goes without saying that he had always obeyed her, but in the old days he had felt free to quarrel a little over it in manly fashion, as is a way with husbands who feel their dignity jeopardized. Of course, in the case of the shoes, he knew that she was right. It *was* foolish to be wearing out shoe-leather on week-days. Besides, his earth-loving feet were punished in their imprisonment, and he was glad to have them free. This, however, did not mitigate his humiliation in the eyes of the children whom he had nurtured, and to see them gloating over it

was more than he could stand; and it is said that in this interval he twice shook the twins until they whimpered, and that once when "the triplers" climbed to his shoulders he suddenly stood up, letting them fall as they might, remarking, as he walked off, "I ain't no step-ladder." But when they tumbled in a heap, bumped and bawling, he relented to the extent of playing horsy for them on all-fours all the forenoon.

Nearly three weeks passed without any apparent change in the situation, and the revival meetings were drawing to a close. Their probationary period of church membership was nearly over. Salina and Steve were still regular attendants at the evening meetings, but they sat in separate pews, and though both joined lustily in the singing of the hymns, their voices were as two. Steve had a voice that always stood alone in any ordinary congregation, no matter how many sang the same words to the same tune, and the result was that he seemed to lead the singing, which was far from the truth. Steve

never led in anything in his life. The fact was that, as is often the case with small men, his voice, a high tenor, was much too large for his body, and when he sang with his might the veins in his high forehead stood out in knots, and his face bore the lines of physical pain, so that one seeing him, even though his song were worthy, would be more apt to be sorry than glad when he sang.

Salina, in no wise a sensitive soul, had always taken great pride in his singing, and she had a way of throwing her velvety voice all around the sharp edges of it as they sang together, standing side by side in the church, filling the roof with a pleasing harmony, so that it was true, in a sense, that she and Steve together had for years led the singing. Perhaps she would have led it without him.

But now, in the very crisis of things, it irritated her to hear Steve's voice ring out clear and strong. It seemed to proclaim him superior to the situation, and this angered her. Nor was she one to decline a challenge. If Steve could sing, so could she—so

did she. She sang for all she was worth—sang her best and loudest; but she sang away from Steve, no longer protecting, but betraying him by every artful turn of her flexible voice, which struck his angles at hurtful points. The singing was never at once so fine and so poor in Mount Zion as now. And yet, although some felt it vaguely, no one could complain, for how could they understand?

The truth of the situation was this:

Steve knew that Salina had always liked his singing, and he sang *to her*—only to her—as truly as ever he-bird sang to his mate. But even Salina—not being a sensitive soul—could not know this. And yet she was sensitive to some things. For example, although Steve sat beyond the range of her vision in a side pew, she discerned his face with her mental eyes. It seemed always before her as he sang—strenuous, distorted, and, for the first time in their lives, defiant. She even knew the places in the up notes where his heels left the floor, and the long

"HE SANG TO HER"

stretches where he clutched the back of the pew before him with his nervous little hands, and it gave her a savage pleasure to sail in, anticipating him disastrously in some of his reaches, or to lag behind, leaving his slender thread notes bare, while she followed majestically, like Cleopatra in her barge.

This little comedy was enacted night after night during the three weeks' services—Steve singing for Salina, Salina singing against Steve—and inversely, as she won in the race, was she loser in popular sympathy. Indeed, everybody was on Steve's side from the first, and the few who, either for lack of interest or through discretion, had not expressed themselves hitherto, declared that when they heard Steve's pitiful "thrill notes," they were too mad to look at Sister Salina Sue.

There is no telling how long Salina's obduracy would have held out, or, indeed, how the story would have ended—though in the nature of things there seems but one natural conclusion—but for the fact that just at this time something happened.

Little Minervy, commonly known on the place as the "middle tripler," was one day sitting on the cane-carrier, where she had climbed for a ride, and came so near being drawn to her death in the machinery of the sugar-mill that old shouting Sam, one of the chief dignitaries on the place, to save her life, thrust her off with a hoe-handle. In the fall her collar-bone was broken, and she was brought home for dead, followed by a procession of excited women and children.

When he heard the news, Steve forgot that he was a single man, and rushing into the cabin, he snatched up the child from Salina's lap and held her on his own, covering her with kisses and tears while restoratives were applied.

Steve was not seen to come out of the cabin when the crowd dispersed—and that is all that any one knows on the subject.

It was on the second morning after this casualty that Salina herself trudged up to the house and asked to see her mistress. As soon as my wife saw her she knew that the

cloud had passed, for she bore herself with beaming complacency as, having courtesied at the door, she approached the empty rocker facing her mistress.

"Please, ma'am, ax me to set down," she began, with a glance at the chair. "I got a lot to talk about dis mornin'."

When she dropped into the chair she closed her eyes for a moment, swaying back and forth, as if to collect her thoughts.

"Well, honey," she said, presently, stopping the motion of her chair, "what kind o' bride you reckon I gwine be?" She chuckled merrily as she said it, but only for a second. "Sho 'nough, missy, I'm gwine git married, Steve an' me, an' I come a-beggin' dis mornin' —an' a-borryin'. I al'ays is said dat ef I ever married, I'd marry in style, an' so I got to have a whole bride's outfit, f'om de veil down, an' less'n you kin hunt me up some'h'n' white to rig out in, I boun' to git a little mo' advance on my wages."

"Well, Salina, I'm glad to see that you have come to your senses." My wife, knowing the

ways of the plantation—or rather knowing that there is no knowing them—expressed no surprise or amusement at the picture suggested of old Salina in a bridal dress. We had known similar instances, differing only in ci cumstances, and it was the part of wisdom, as Steve's friend, to treat the matter delicately. And so, paying no heed to her allusion to her dress, she said: "I'm glad you have come to your senses, Aunt Salina. I don't see how you hesitated."

"Well—of co'se—baby—it's too late to talk about it now," the woman faltered. "Hit's too late to talk about it now, but ef I'd 'a' knowed it 'd come to dis, I'd 'a' picked out *somebody* whilst I was a-pickin'—but it's too late now. Ef I'd try to sen' Steve away now, look like de chillen 'd all turn on me—besides, Steve ain't to say well. He ain't fitten to go out, a widder-man or a bachelor, wid dat cold on his chist. An' de preacher say dat ef I was to sen' 'im off, I couldn't pass for a widder. He say I wouldn't be no mo'n a ole maid,

w'ich, it seem to me, wid all dem chillen, would be a disgrace.

"But it's all settled now, an' we gwine be married nex' Saturday week. I had to put it off a week or so, so's me an' Lucy 'd have time to git our clo'es ready. I done took up de seams o' dem pants marster gi'n Steve; an' his christenin'-coat, I'll vinegar it over an' press it good; an' de preacher he keeps marryin' hat an' gloves to hire for ten cents, an' rings either to hire or sell. Steve done bought de ring, at fifteen cents a week f'om now tell Christmas. You know Steve always was racklas extravagant. An' so de ole man he's fixed—but me an' Lucy, of co'se we mus' git our white frocks an' gloves, an'—"

"I'll attend to your dress, Salina," my wife said, rather resenting the double request, "but really I don't see why your daughter need have a white gown too."

"'Caze she gwine stan' bridesmaid, mistus—dat's de on'ies' reason. Yas'm, she gwine stan' up wid us, an' she's tickled all but to death over it. She's purty nigh fifteen, I

s'pec', an' hit 'll be jes de same as comin' out in s'ciety. Yas'm, she gwine be de bridesmaid, an' pull off my glove whilst her pa put de ring on my finger; an' hit 'll be a mighty good an' 'ligious thing for her to remember in after-years—yas'm. 'Tain't every yo'ng gal dat kin ricollec' her pa an' ma gittin' married. Come to think it over, I s'pose I'll feel mo' cancelized in my min' when it's did an' over 'cordin' to de requi'emints. Sev'al couples wha' been th'ough it say dey feels a heap mo' consolated in dey hearts.

"But, tell de trufe, missy, I'd give five dollars—ef I had it—right now ef Steve on'y had a nobler shape an' some *git-up* to him, jes for de passage up de island o' de chu'ch. Hit's worse'n a cake-walk, de way our folks passes remarks on bridal couples when dey step up in chu'ch. An' po' little Lucy she got her pa's build too; an' so Steve he say I sho is gwine be belle o' de weddin', ef I is gittin' ole an' got a yardful o' chillen.

"Po' little Steve! When it come to a 'oman passin' heart-jedgmint on a man, I

b'lieve pitifulness pleads for him stronger'n good looks—yas'm. Des de glimsh o' Steve's little slope-shouldered back when he'd cross de yard deze las' two weeks, an' his little bow-legs in dem white breeches—dem inside starched seams al'ays tickles him tur'ble—I clare, some days when I'd look at him my heart would be so teched dat, 'cep'n' for de lump in my th'oat, I'd 'a' called him in an' eased his mind.

"Po' little Lucy! She had her hands full deze las' few weeks ironin' her pa's co'tin' outfit; an' she deserve to stan' bridesmaid to compliment her for her trouble—yas, she do."

She leaned back in her chair and began rocking softly, and presently she said:

"All de chillen's in favor o' de weddin'—all dat kin talk, an' I mought as well say de rest too, 'caze de one wha' made up de riconcilemint she can't talk yit, on'y two or three words. But she knowed some'h'n' was wrong, Minervy did—"

I had slipped into the room unobserved some moments before, and seeing her hesitate

here, I said, "Go on, Salina, and tell us all about it."

"I 'clare, Marse Joe!" She was really embarrassed for a moment, seeing me there, but it passed quickly. Rising to her feet, she turned to me as she went on: "Well, hit was dis-a-way, marster. You know de yether day, time Minervy got th'owed off de cane-carrier, of co'se we-all 'lowed she was kilt; an' quick as her daddy heerd tell of it he come a-runnin' in an' snatch her off my lap an' hol' her whilst we-all dowsed her wid cold water, an' ole Aunt Mimie helped bring her th'ough wid mustard an' prayer; an' I nuver said nothin', on'y set down on a stool by him an' moan in'ardly, tell d'rec'ly she opened her little eyes—you know Minervy she got deze heah cunnin' little squir'l cross-eyes, jes like her pa—an' dat teched me. But look like my heart was so hardened I couldn't say nothin', jes set still. But quick as she open her eyes an' see her pa, what you reckon she done, an' her little collar-bone all fractioned too? She lif' her little arm up an' put it roun' her pa's

neck, an' den she re'ch over wid de yether an' pull my face down to him, an' hol' us tight jes so—"

She paused here and wiped her eyes.

"I tell you, marster an' mistus, ef little Minervy, ef she had a-died an' lef' me uncancelized wid 'er pa, I nuver would 'a' forgive myse'f on earth—never would. I'd 'a' took it for a heavenly venjams on me—yas'm—yas, sir.

"But of co'se she see in a minute dat hit was all right 'twix' her pa an' me—de way we cried—an' she laugh a little weak laugh. For a while look like de whole yardful was cryin' under de mulberries—cryin', laughin', bofe togedder."

She wiped her eyes again, and said some really womanly things touching her life and its responsibilities—simple resolutions they were—wifely and maternal, which perhaps it were more delicate to pass over in this light telling of her story, lest it seem a betrayal. But we liked her better for it.

"Well, I mus' go," she said, presently; "I

mus' go to my cook-pots; an' I gwine leave de white frock an' de veil an' de wreath all to you, you say, missy? An' Lucy's frock, too? Thanky, ma'am; thanky truly, ma'am. Lucy an' Steve will sho be proud when I tell 'em. But I does wish you could see Steve's face dis mornin'. He got de dry grins so bad he's ashamed to come up to de house. You say whar is he? He out behin' de kitchen mindin' de chillen—'Nervy an' de twins. Look like de whole crowd's a-waitin' on 'im.

"De fust thing I done when we got engaged over ag'in was to meck him go in an' teck off dem duck breeches an' put on some woollen clo'es. I b'lieve he's sneezed mo' sence he's started a-co'tin' 'n he's sneezed all his life. A co'tin' man 'ain't got a bit o' sense.

Well, I mus' go—an' don't forgit de orange-flower wreath, mistus, an'— What dat you say? Yas, I know we mought git fresh flowers off de trees now, but—but—but dey'd look mighty cheap, seem like. Hunt me up some real superficial rag flowers,

please, ma'am. An' I'll be glad when it's all over. But after waitin' so long, for Gord sake, lemme git married in style. I don't teck much stock in marryin', nohow.

"I wouldn't min' totin' a big bo'quet o' orange blossoms in my hand ef you sesso—wid a white ribbin on 'em—jes as you say. We gwine leave it all to you, missy, an' marster. Well, I'm gone. So long!"

She started out, and when she got to the door she burst out laughing.

"For Gord sake, missy," she chuckled, "come heah an' look at Steve; jes look at him settin' in de baby's ca'iage, an' de whole crowd harnessed up draggin' him round de yard—an' he grinnin' like a chessy cat. He sho is earned dat one ride.

"How could I ever thought about sendin' 'im off!"

MINERVY'S VALENTINES

MINERVY'S VALENTINES

OWARD knew by the old man's face, when he hobbled into the library, that he had come to ask a favor. He bowed obsequiously several times, flourishing his fragment of a hat apologetically as he approached him, and, contrary to his habit, begged to be allowed to sit down.

Howard drew the low rocker opposite his own seat.

"Certainly, Uncle 'Lum; sit down and make yourself comfortable. And what can I do for you this morning?"

Instead of answering, the old negro drew out his bandanna handkerchief and began slowly to wipe his face. He evidently felt some embarrassment, and was trying to mas-

ter it before he should venture upon his errand. Finally, however, he chuckled:

"Umh! I sca'cely know how to state it, Marse Howard. I—I jes 'lowed I'd drap in an' have a little talk dis mornin', an' maybe, after a while, you'd do a little writin' fur me—not now, tell we talks it over." Then shifting his position, he said, tentatively, "Is you ever writ a valentime, marster?"

Howard laughed.

"No, Uncle 'Lum, I have never written one, exactly, but I have directed about a dozen for the boys during the last two days. Who started the valentine fever on the plantation, anyhow? And don't tell me you have caught it."

"I 'ain't caught nothin' f'om dese young fool niggers, ef dat what you mean—no, sir. I been knowin' 'bout valentimes 'fo' dey was born, but de valentimes we-all's white folks sont aroun' in de ole days was wuth talkin' about. Dey warn't no sech scandalous-lookin' things as I see flyin' roun' de plantation de las' few days—no, sir.

"Plantation niggers ain't fitten to communicate dey emotions wid valentimes, nohow. Half o' de boys an' gals on de place ain't speakin' to each other to-day an' 'istiddy, an' dey been three free fights down in de puckon grove, all on account o' dese picture valentimes gwine back an' fo'th.

"Thick-lip Sarey she got one wid nothin' but a big mouf wid hands an' foots to it, an' quick as she received it she withdrawed her speech f'om three o' de boys she helt onder s'picion, an' she quit her work in de fiel', an' walked, snortin' mad, all de way ten miles to town to pick out three o' de insultin'es' ones she could git to sen' back; an' when de boys got 'em—of co'se two of 'em was 'bleeged to be innocent—dey all three s'picioned two or three gals apiece, an' dat's de way hit trabbles —trouble in de valentime's track.

"But I don't call sech as dat *valentimes*, nohow. I calls dem no better'n word-o'-mouth insults. When *I* sends a valentime, I sends de *quality* sort. I ricollec' when my young mistus used to git all manner o' picture

valentimes, wid roses an' hearts an' dese heah cunnin' little naked boy babies on 'em—an' po'try verses. I 'member in p'tic'lar one she got wha' come in a box, all sweet-smellin', an' tied wid a sash-ribbin, an' all you had to do was to pull out a little do'-knob in de picture, an' it 'd begin to stretch out, same as a 'cordion, tell it would stan' all alone by itse'f, an' d'rec'ly you could peep in an' see a flower-gyarden an' a peacock an' a lady settin' beside a young man on a paper sofy, an' po'try words under 'em, splainin' out eve'ything, same as a love-letter. *Dem* was *valentimes*. All dese low-down, red-nose, slim-neck, bald-head, fork-tail pictures wha' de boys is intrustin' to de gals dey claim to love, nowadays, I class dem as blackguardin'.

"But I started to tell yer about a valentime I sont once-t. Of co'se hit 'was secon'-han'; but dat didn't hurt it. Hit was one my young mistus got f'om a young man wha' she hated, an' so she passed it on to me, an' tol' me I could fling it away; but of co'se white fling-aways is nigger treasures, so I took an'

sont it to a gal I was sort o' holdin' off f'om, jes to see how she'd teck it."

He chuckled to himself as if over a pleasant memory.

"And how did she take it, uncle?"

He did not answer for some minutes.

"Well," he said, presently, " 'tain't no use to go over de groun'. Howsomever, I reckon I'll haf to tell you a little about it. Of co'se nigger doin's told in white lang'age, dey seems fureign; but, tell de trufe, Marse Howard, de lady I wants a valentime fur now, she's *de same lady*. She was my fust wife—when I wasn't no mo'n a boy, sca'cely. I was married to her reg'lar, out'n de book, in ole marster's libr'y, by a white-robe preacher. Seem like it ought to helt strong, but ef folks wants to stray, look like *nothin'* don't hol' 'em.

"I nuver was to say good-lookin', not even in my bes' days, an' Minervy—dat was her name, Minervy—she say she wouldn't 'a' married me nohow, 'cep'n' fur my ways. I nuver put on no ways in p'tic'lar, so fur as I

knowed; but, howsomever, either she got so used to my ways dey didn't ketch 'er taste no mo', or maybe dey mought o' changed an' me not know it. Dey say eve'y man's ways changes mo' or less arter he's married. But to come to de p'int, she up an' lef' me one day —follered a tall, stately, light-complected yaller man wid looks an' behavior—follered him down de river, an' set up housekeepin' wid 'im on a raft, an' I 'ain't nuver seen 'er face to face f'om dat day. I reckon she had a purty tough time of it, an' I 'ain't got no hard feelin's to her. We all follers our lead-in's. Ef dey good, so much de better; an' ef dey bad, so much de wuss.

"We was livin' up in Howard County dem days, an' I didn't want to face de music, an' so I come down heah, whar I didn't know nobody, an' took up mo' land 'n I felt able to work, jes wid de intentiom o' killin' myse'f—but 'stid o' dat, heah I is axin' you to write me another valentime. When a pusson stops to think, Jordan is a strange road to trabble, sho enough.

"Well, sir, now I'm a-comin' to de story part. Who you reckon but my same little ole Minervy is jes lately turned up down heah in de Ozan bottom? Dey tell me she's all by 'erse'f, an' de 'S'ciety fur de P'omotion o' Widders an' Orphans,' hit pays her three dollars a month fur bein' a widder; an' ole man Joe Taylor, he say she draws fur bein' a orphan too, which seem to me like dat ain't sca'cely fair, an' she over adult age. She mus' be 'long about fifty or sixty. Yit 'n' still, come down to it, she's a honester orphan 'n she is a widder. But of co'se ef I was to speak out, I'd deprive her of de widder part, so I boun' to lay low. Ever sence I knowed she come back by 'erse'f, I been studyin' to fin' some way I could reach out my han' to her in de dark — an' pass on. So when de valentime fever come up ag'in, seem like maybe hit mought gi'e me a chance.

"An' so won't you please, sir, try to git me up a reel fancy fastidious valentime to sen' 'er? Maybe hit mought raise 'er courage a

little to know somebody thought dat much of 'er."

Here was a romance. Howard turned and looked at the old man.

"Aren't you afraid she would suspect you, since you sent her one in the old days? And if she should, mightn't she naturally want you to take her back?"

He thought awhile over this. Then he said:

"No, sir, I don't reckon she would. You see, she'd haf to gi'e up dat widder's three dollars a month, s'ciety money. You know, a taste o' free money, hit's same as pizen in de blood. Hit's wuss 'n vaccination ag'in' work. No; de valentime won't do no harm. Hit 'll jes be some'h'n' to teck down an' look at offn an' on th'ough de day, an' at night befo' she go to bed, an' to console her sperits when she feels lonesome. Of co'se hit's boun' to bring me back to her min', an' I don't keer ef it do. You know, Minervy, she was de purties' little slim-ankle yaller gal dat ever trod de cotton row in de ole days—no mis-

take about it. An' I reckon, accordin' to white righteousness, she's my legal wife yit; but of co'se dat's jes on paper. But in my heart some days I sort o' hankers arter her changeable ways even yit. You nuver knowed what she was li'ble to do nex'."

"And don't you think that maybe you will go back to her some day?"

"An' leave de chillen's mammy? Oh no, Marse Howard. Oh no. Leave my ole 'oman, Nance Ann—out yander cookin' my supper now? I thinks de world an' all o' Nance Ann, an' she knows it. Of co'se I don't want no remarks passed about dis valentime business; but I know you's a genterman, an' you ain't gwine talk.

"You see, dis ain't nothin' but pure bygone love 'twix' me an' little Minervy—dat's all. But you know how womens is. Ef Nance Ann knowed it—"

Howard was amused, and thinking to try him, he said:

"Why not send Nance Ann one, too?

Then, in case she should ever hear about it, she wouldn't—"

"Yas, sir, she would! I tell yer she *can't* heah about it, marster! Lord have mussy! An' as to sendin' *Nance Ann* a valentime, I 'clare I believe she'd whup me ag'in. No, dey nuver was a day I'd 'a' dared to sen' her sech as dat. She warn't dat sort—not even time we was keepin' company. De fus thing I ever gin her was a pink gingham frock, an' she took 'n' took it back to de sto'e, an' swapped it off fur a fryin'-pan an' skillet, 'caze she say hit wouldn't wash. She's one o' deze homespun gals, Nance Ann is.

"But of co'se Minervy she's de yether sort; but she was a pleasu'ble little gal. So you'll fix up de valentime fine, please, sir?"

"Why, yes, I will try to—if you'll tell me what to say."

The old man turned to Howard aghast.

"Tell you what to say? Why, Marse Howard, how does I know? You de one wha' got educatiom. You knows what to say. De onies' thing I ax you p'tic'lar is please be

sho to put a piece o' reel up-an'-down love-po'try in it for me."

"But, really, old man, you'll have to give me some idea about it."

"How is I gwine gi'e you a idee about pen-writin', marster? No, sir! Ef I had a-know-ed what to say, I'd 'a' made some o' de boys put it down fur me, on'y dey mought 'a' peached on me. You jes meck it a reg'lar fancy valentime, same as ef you was writin' it to a high-tone young white lady. I don't want no insinuatioms about ole age or sorrer in it, an' no hint about de way she acted, nuther. De one my young mistus gi'e me, hit had a white-lady picture standin' on it, wid yaller curls, an' a long piece o' po'try about blue eyes an' ruby lips, an' it tickled her mightily. When she received it, she twis' her head on one side, an' she say, ef I loves her so strong dat I seem to see her in dat light, she 'bleege to marry me.

"Dat gives you de startin'-p'int, an' I don't want dis one to go back on it—noways. But what I wants now is jes to make her

blood circulate a little, an' gi'e her some'h'n' to ponder about; an' when you gits it done, I'll come, an' you kin read it off to me, please, sir.

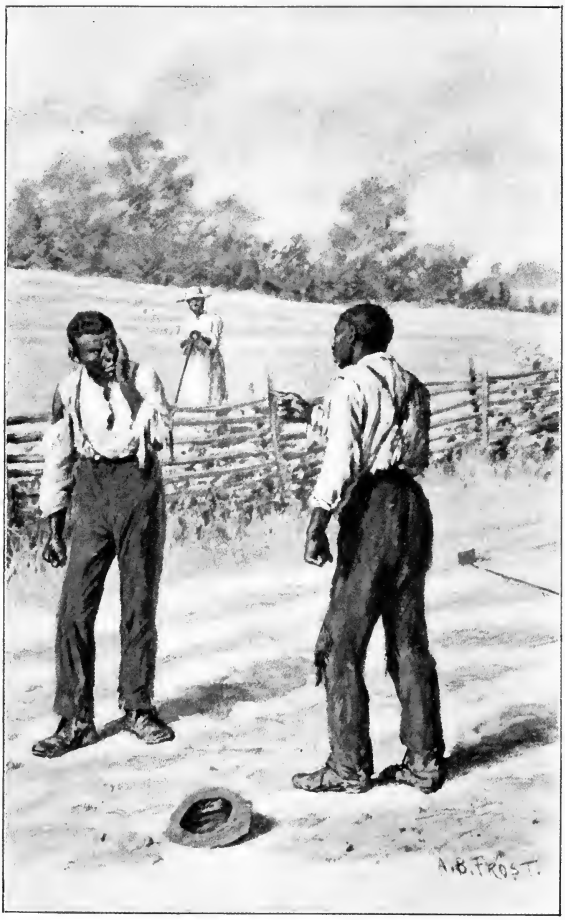
"I passed by de place whar she stay de yether day—time I driv down to de Ozan wid de mules—an' I see a stout ole lady settin' in de cabin do', fannin' 'erse'f, an' I don't doubt it was her. Hit always did become her to set down an' ac' 'bove-ish. Arter I seen 'er, seem like I was sort o' giddy an' forgitful all day. Ole Jim Towers he seen her, an' he say she's changed consider'ble, but she's peart-featured yit, an' I don't doubt it.

"An' when you gits de valentime done, I gwine put a dollar bill in it—but fur Gord' sake don't you say nothin' about dat. I don't want no Feb'uary cyclone in my cabin. I gwine try to manage to sen' little Minervy a dollar once-t in a while, long as she's by 'erse'f, jes for ricollectiom' sake; an' of co'se I don't deny it's a in'ard satisfactiom, too, *to know she's come down to it.* I got jes dat much o' de ole Adam in me, an' so long as it

don't make me rob no pocket but my own, I reckon Gord 'll forgive it. I'd like mightily to let 'er know I owns my own lan' an' mules, but I reckon dat's a-ca'yin' malice too fur. I daresn't do it, nohow, 'caze ef she know I'm heah, she'd gimme trouble, sho. She don't know but what I'm dead an' buried 'way up in Howard County; but she keeps my name—an' dat sort o' gi'e me de all-overs when I heerd it. Of co'se, time I come out heah, a green-grass widderer, I changed my intitlemints. I made a boy I know open a history-book an' call out de fus name on de page, an' he calt out Christopher Columbus, an' dat minute he christened me, but he didn't know it. I done it so's I could forgit who I was myse'f, an' start in an' work myse'f to death. Dat was my fatal desire. I'd 'a' took to drink ef I had a-been dat sort o' fool, but, thank Gord, I was jes a nachel fool fur work. I done worked off trouble all my life.

"So I started out—no mo' thought o' nair 'oman in my min' 'n I had of a giaskutus or glory's crown; but, Lord have mussy! I

hadn't no sooner tuck up lan' 'n I see a slim black gal workin' de fiel' nex' but one to mine, an' I took 'n' took notice to de way she'd fling de hoe, not noticin' in p'tic'lar, but jes takin' notice—*so*. Well, in de fiel' 'twix' her an' me dey was a yo'ng yaller man, an' I soon see dat he was tryin' wid every effort of his constitutiom to wait on Miss Hoe-flinger, an' she nuver give 'im no incouragemint—jes stan' off like a stalk o' cane, an' sway wid de win'. So dat went on tell one day I see he was a-pesterin' 'er constant, an' I see her cast jes one sheep-eye over to my fiel', so *wid dat, I up an' whupped him out*, an' tol' 'im ef he showed 'is face in dat neighborhood ag'in I'd *kill* 'im—an' I'd 'a' done it, too. Of co'se he had planted all his lan' in cotton, an' he could o' come back in his fiel' by fo'ce o' law, but he knowed hit would o' took all de sheriff's men to purtect 'im ef he tried hit; so at last me an' him we shuck hands like enemies, an' he sol' out his plantin' to Nance Ann an' me, in pardnership, an' of co'se dat was huccome we come to—



"'I UP AN' WHUPPED HIM OUT'"

"You know one pardnership leads to another, an'—

"Well, she's de chillen's mammy, Nance Ann is, an' I thinks a heap of 'er.

"Sir? What dat you say? Yas, sir, I don't deny she whupped me once-t—but no doubt I needed hit. Nance Ann is a powerful build sence she stoutened out, and she's got a sense o' jestice to match her figgur. I acted mighty bad once-t, an' ef she hadn't a-chastised me de way she done, I mought 'a' did it ag'in. Dat's huccome I say I daresn't let 'er know about dis heah valentime. Dat one whuppin' she gi'e me was about a lady.

"Nance Ann 'ain't nuver is mentioned dat yether lady's name to me f'om dat day to dis, an' I 'ain't nuver is laid my eyes on de lady sence, nuther.

"But about de valentime, marster?"

"I was just going to say, Uncle 'Lum, there are no pretty valentines for sale here, and you are a day late as it is. Perhaps I might find a picture that you'd like, and write some verses to it—"

"Dat what I'm a-tellin' yer, boss. Ain't dat what I been urgin' you to do for a hour? You got a plenty o' purty pictures layin' roun' loose heah in yo' libr'y. Ef you'll stick one of 'em on a piece o' scalloped reesin-box paper, an' indite some po'try verses to suit hit, you kin take my word fur it, when Minervy gits it she'll ile her face fresh an' polish it off, an' start out an' hunt a reader, an' when she hears de love-po'try she'll set her head sideways an' meck up a story to match hit. I wouldn't be surprised ef she got credit fur a month's groceries on dat valentime—ef you meck it sumptu'us - lookin'. *Dat's Minervy!*

"Well, sir, I done talked too long a'ready, an' I'm gwine. I'll drap in dis evenin', ef you sesso, an' listen an' look at it."

He had risen, and was moving towards the door.

"Better come over here now, uncle, and look over some pictures with me." Howard led the way to the easel, where there were a number of portfolios, and selected several at-

tractive studies of negro girls. "Here are some very pretty ones. How about these?"

The old man deliberately adjusted his glasses, but at a first glance he removed them, and looked Howard straight in the eyes.

"Fur Gord's sake, Marse Howard!" he exclaimed, "'ain't you got no white folks? You reckon I 'ain't got no mo' manners 'n to th'ow up a lady's color to her dat-a-way? No, sirree; not me."

Howard placed before him the next thing that came to his hand. It chanced to be a stately "Gibson girl," reduced for magazine use.

The old man studied it carefully for a few moments, and shook his head.

"Dat sho is a noble figgur of a 'oman," he said at last, eying the study at different angles; "but ain't she purty rigorous an' rawboned fur a love-lady, marster? Seem to me she looks sort o' proud an' hongry. Pass on some mo', please, sir. I wouldn't hurt little Minervy's feelin's—not fur nothin'."

Howard could not help smiling as he laid

several other figures before the old man, all, as the first, delightful things from the white man's point of view; but he saw one after another laid aside as it failed to meet some requirement of the old lover's fancy.

Finally, the old man put them all away and took off his glasses. This gave his vision longer range, and he was soon attracted to a pile of fashion-books on a rack near.

As he turned from one colored plate to another he fairly chuckled aloud, and Howard was amused to follow him through several books before he finally selected a slim lady in pink, with side curls and a lace mantilla.

"Heah she is!" he exclaimed. "Jes look at her standin' so swayback, an' feedin' a swan out'n 'er hand. Ef I could fin' a loose picture as purty as dat, I'd—"

When Howard tore the plate from the book and laid it in his hand, the old fellow's childish delight was really pathetic. He even chuckled aloud as he held it at arm's-length, viewing it at different angles.

"Now fur a little piece o' paper lace roun'

de aidges—an' de po'try verse! Don't, fur Gord's sake, Marse Howard, forgit de po'try, an' meck it fine an' ticklish. I don't want no 'roses red,' nuther. It's wo'e out.

"Lemme see."

He dropped his head, closed his eyes, and began rubbing his bald pate.

"Lemme see. Dey used to be a piece o' po'try wid 'prithee' in hit; hit commenced somehow or other. I 'clare de mo' I tries to think, de mo' I forgits, but hit was mighty super*flu*ous an' fine—"

The word reminded Howard of a dainty verse that he had years ago pasted in his scrap-book—the delicate "Toujours Amour" of the poet Stedman. He opened the book, and read it aloud slowly, the old man bending forward eagerly, so as not to miss a word:

> "'Prithee, tell me, Dimple-chin,
> At what age does love begin?
> Your blue eyes have scarcely seen
> Summers three, my fairy queen,
> But a miracle of sweets,
> Soft approaches, sly retreats,

Show the little archer there,
Hidden in your pretty hair.
When didst learn a heart to win?
Prithee, tell me, Dimple-chin.'
'Oh,' the rosy lips reply,
'I can't tell you, if I try.
'Tis so long, I can't remember.
Ask some younger lass than I.'"

The old negro's eyes were fairly beaming.

"Dat sho is lovely, Marse Howard. Hit sho is; an' de dimple-chin, dat suits her down to de groun'. But couldn't you set 'er up a little *in years?* Three yeahs, dat won't do. Jes set 'er up to de fus bloom o' youth. Read dat age line once-t mo', please, sir."

Howard repeated the couplet—

"'Your blue eyes have scarcely seen
Summers three, my fairy queen—'"

"How would hit do to slip in 'fo'teen yeahs' or 'sixteen yeahs'—any one o' de young ages wha' fit de line—"

"Why, yes, old man; we might do that, I suppose, if you wish it; but you haven't let

me finish reading the poem yet." He could scarcely keep a twinkle out of his eye as he began the second stanza—

"'Tell, oh, tell me, Grizzle-face.'"

This first line was greeted by a grunt, and the old man straightened himself, but he did not interrupt by a word, and Howard began again:

"'Tell, oh, tell me, Grizzle-face,
Do your heart and head keep pace?
When does hoary love expire?
When do frosts put out the fire?
Can its embers burn below
All that chill December snow?
Care you still soft hands to press,
Bonny heads to smooth and bless?
When does love give up the chase?
Tell, oh, tell me, Grizzle-face.'
'Ah!' the wise old lips reply,
'Youth may pass, and strength may die;
But of love I can't foretoken.
Ask some older sage than I.'"

After the first blurt of protest the old man had been so still that Howard wondered how

he were taking it. When he stopped reading and looked up, he was shocked to find him in tears. As soon as the old man realized himself observed, however, he began to laugh.

"Fur Gord' sake, marster, excuse me," he chuckled, still wiping his eyes. "Whar in kingdom come did you git sech a double-bar'l shot-gun as dat to fire at me? I could 'a' stood it all right ef I hadn't saw my ole face in yo' lookin'-glass heah de minute you purnounced de word 'Grizzle-face,' an' f'om dat on seem like every word hit me. Leave all dat las' part out o' de valentime, please, sir, fur Gord' sake; but ef hit ain't too much trouble, I wusht you'd read it over again, slow, jes fur me — while I study ole Grizzle-face in de glass."

It was with quite another mind that Howard read the lines again, and when he had finished them he closed the book.

"Thanky, thanky, marster. Dat would be a good answer fur her to sen' back to me—ef she knowed it. Lordy, how a lookin'-glass kin set a pusson back! But dey's one thing

sho. Whoever writ dat po'try, he knowed little Minervy—an' he knowed me.

"I feels like as ef I was walkin' in a dream, an' I dun'no' how I gwine wake up an' come back to life."

At this moment there were voices outside, as if some one were inquiring. The old man turned quickly, listened a moment, and sprang to his feet.

"Who dat?" he exclaimed. "Dat's Nance Ann at de do', sho's you born. How long is I been settin' heah, anyhow?"

TOBE TAYLOR'S APRIL FOOLISHNESS

TOBE TAYLOR'S APRIL FOOLISHNESS

OBE TAYLOR, the plantation wag, seems to have been a natural humorist, or, as his fond mother put it, he was "a born game-maker f'om de ground up, fo'told an' fo'ordained."

As to this last we shall presently hear; but certain it is that from the old days when as a lad Tobe had missed his dinner to lie in wait for the field-hands, who tripped in the snares he set for their feet, to the time of this telling, no one ever felt quite safe within the range of his "deviltry."

Tobe was no respecter of persons, times, or places, and a setting hen or the bishop of the diocese invited him about equally as possible

victims of a practical joke. The holy Sabbath or the sanctuary was his to employ on occasion, and yet, although he had sometimes closely skirted the dangerous edge of impropriety, he had, somehow, never quite stepped over the bounds—which is to say, he had never done so by common consent.

Of course, there were frequent irate minorities who declared him guilty of breaking the entire decalogue, more or less, but they were always such as in the very nature of things were not in position for a fair perspective. There was always—figuratively, at least—an applauding audience who pronounced his comedies worthy—and what more could any comedian ask?

For instance, on the memorable occasion when he had put sorghum syrup into the baptismal font at the September christening, and had ten mothers struggling to keep the flies off their eleven babies during the rest of the ceremony, while they sat conspicuously in the amen pews, he had pretty nearly gone too far, and, indeed, he was saved from public dis-

grace only by a coincidence which committed the officiating minister to leniency.

To such as are not familiar with the methods or the vernacular of some of the most faithful preachers of the Word, in districts either over or under populated, it may seem that Brother Saul Sanders was culpably indecorous when he exclaimed with fervor, as he held his hands in benediction over the line of babes before the ceremony, "I tell yer, feller-sinners, dey ain't no flies on baptized chillen."

Even as he spoke he thrust his hand into the baptismal font, and as he did so a swarm of flies rose from its surface, and when presently the babes passed, one by one, under the hand of generous sprinkling, each one was seen to carry away its quota of the swarm in a buzzing halo of flies about its head.

Perhaps the absurdity of the thing might have reached only the scattering few who were doing their best to preserve decorum, had not brother Saul, overcome with the humor of the situation, remarked, with a

chuckle, "I 'clare, when I said dey warn't no flies on baptized chillen, I wasn't no mo'n usin' a figgur o' Scripture speech."

This, of course, licensed the explosion of mirth that greeted it, and in the midst of the hilarity Tobe Taylor slipped out of church and ran boldly into the woods, the back of his shaking shoulders in full view of the entire congregation—a way he had of confessing a thing he had done by dodging an assumed accusation. Thus he seized his success at full tide.

Of course no one thought Tobe did right in this instance, but there were really only ten people in the entire congregation who felt that he had committed an unpardonable sin, and who would have been glad to help tar and feather him then and there, excepting for the babies they carried—so they said. Some of the other mothers would hardly have forgiven him, perhaps, had they not been seen laughing. Indeed, every one in church laughed, excepting only the twenty-one who made up the comedy—even the few straggling fathers,

who ought to have been ashamed of themselves.

As Tobe's own people were Baptists, perhaps he could hardly have been expected to have a proper reverence for the ceremony repudiated of his sect. This seems the only possible excuse for him, unless, indeed, we accept his mother's claim that when Tobe saw a chance for a joke, he just *couldn't help playing it.* Whether this was valid or not, she certainly gave some very serious and cogent reasons for her hypothesis in the way of prenatal influences, planetary and other, not to mention a certain prophecy spoken concerning him by an old blind voudoo prophetess to whom she had gone seeking enlightenment some months before his birth. Peering with sightless eyes into the night, the sorceress had raised her thin hands, and whispered mysteriously:

"You looks fer a soldier on de March,
Or a scholar on his way to school,
But all I see is a rainbow arch
Like a jumpin'-rope for a April fool."

Three times over, with only a little obscurity always at the end of the first line, she had said these mysterious words to the waiting woman, Zenobia, and so they had remained in her mind. She was never sure whether the words closing the first line were "in the March" or "on the March" or "in the marsh," until the month of March had passed in ungratified expectation, and on the first day of April there arrived the cheeriest of brown cherubs at the birth-cabin, when the happy mother told the story to the women about her bed, and laughed with them as she thought of her babe's being not only worthy the prestige of an unequivocal prophecy, but so close to the heavenly favor as to make free with the mystical sign of promise. Think of even figuratively jumping rope with the rainbow! Almost any one would be willing to be a fool for five minutes for such a privilege—realizing how many have to be fools all their lives for nothing—and that all who are fools do not know it, and that perhaps—?

If Tobe had not literally danced with the

rainbow all his life, he seems, in every sense that a prophet could desire, to have made good the spirit of this prediction. Perhaps no better illustration of this could be found than the one just cited. When once his playful fancies were focussed on a scheme of fun, no thought of irreverence seems to have entered as a deterrent into Tobe's artless consciousness. And no doubt there was truth as well as charity in the claim of his defenders that "Tobe didn't never mean no harm by nothin'." It is also true that he rarely did any real harm. It was a waste of raw material, no doubt, to throw out a good setting of goose eggs, and to substitute under the unconscious sitter a half-dozen half-hatched alligators that he found in the sand; but the barn-yard sensation that it produced seemed to Tobe to make it worth while—that is to say, if Tobe did it. This was one of the things which were found done, and as it was only hissed — from the mother-goose up — Tobe never confessed it. Neither did he ever own to the filling the toes of Phidias Joy's patent-

leather shoes with tar—and for different reasons.

Of course Phidias might have gotten the shoes off if there had been any socks, but as it was he had been obliged to go to the field for a week in the tight patent-leathers.

That was funny, but it was not half so funny as the expression of that young gallant's face as he limped along the cane rows, abusing all "durn fools" in general under his breath. He would have scored Tobe roundly, but for reasons. Incidentally, Tobe was the champion wrestler of six plantations, and he was captain of the "Black and Tan" baseball nine, and Phidias was designed for a watch-charm. There was more comfort in not knowing who put the tar in his boots than there could possibly have been in finding out.

Phidias could have had the shoes cut from his feet, of course, but he wanted to save them, and Tobe knew it. He wondered what efforts Phidias was making for his relief, and he even had the assurance to surprise the

little man one evening about bedtime, when he found him sitting with his feet in a bucket of kerosene-oil, calmly reading his Bible.

"I sh'd think you'd be afeerd to fetch dat Bible so near yo' foots, Phidias," he remarked, dryly; and when Phidias asked why, he drawled,

" 'Case you know de Word hit's a lamp unto yo' feet, an' ef you don't look out, you'll splode." Tobe was a bright fellow.

No one ever knew just how Phidias finally got the shoes off, but in about ten days from their attachment he strolled into the field one morning barefoot and smiling, and at the Saturday evening cake-walk following he appeared in patent-leathers which were unquestionably the same—that is to say, the uppers were the same. Phidias had been to town, and there were some who said the soles of his shoes were new. They had only been "as good as new" when they first became his through a misfit of a young lawyer, who had sold them to Phidias on time for five dollars, to be paid in promiscuous shoe-polishing and

errand-running at no stipulated rate. The fact is they had about cost him his freedom for an indefinite period.

They came high, but they were the only full patent-leathers that had ever appeared in plantation circles in this region, and, as he said, they were "worth the money."

Of course there were times in Tobe's career when it seemed to the thoughtful observer that nothing was quite so much needed as some one powerful enough to take him by the nape of the neck—in lieu of the absent collar—and to shake a little reverence and fear into him; but there are certain easy-going, loose-jointed, lounging folk whom it is obviously best to "keep friends with" on general principles. Tobe was one of these.

The 1st of April was Tobe's red-letter day, in a calendar all printed more or less in gay color. It would have been so, probably, even had it not been his birthday.

"Birfday in two munts—birfday in three weeks—birfday in a week—birfday day arter

to-morrer — birfday to-morrer — *better look out!*"

So it had been his life habit to approach it. As a matter of fact, people on the place were afraid to eat or to drink, to turn their backs; or to answer a civil question on this day when Tobe was within ear-shot, or even when he was not, lest he be in hiding.

And so, when on the morning of his nineteenth birthday it was rumored that Tobe was ill, everybody smiled, wondering what part this ruse was to play in the day's comedy.

When the morning passed, however, and he did not appear, and late in the afternoon he was seen to stroll languidly over to the wash-house, looking gray about the mouth and with his head tied up, the women who saw him were convinced that he was not "possuming." Old Aunt Judy, the deaf superannuated woman who lived at the wash-house, and was presiding genius of the tubs, was very fond of Tobe, and it was his habit to seek her comfortable hearth when he need-

ed coddling. When she saw him to-day, she threw him her gray blanket, poured several things into a tomato-can and set it on the coals, and Tobe knew that he would soon have a dose of the good, oniony, sugary, cinnamon-flavored, buttery, bitter brew with which Judy intercepted all the common ills of life, and which Tobe thought almost as good as molasses candy. Tobe was really pretty miserable to-day; and when he closed his eyes and rolled into the blanket like a cocoon before the fire, he was as guiltless of any mischievous intention as the cat that slept beside him. Even when he happened to notice a tiny brown hand on the pallet behind the clothes-rack, and crawled over to look at the washer-woman's babies that he knew were asleep there, he was impelled by simple childish curiosity alone. It was only when the line of babies recalled the christening episode that he suddenly realized in them a challenge and an opportunity. In about two minutes he had forgotten all about his impending chill, and was chuckling with inward joy over

an idea—a regular first-of-April birthday idea!

"Fer Gord sake!" he giggled. "Talk about pease in a pod! I wonder would dey mammies know 'em ef I was to pull off dey clo'es an' turn 'em loose in dey skins?"

He peeped under the screen to see where Aunt Judy's feet were, and could just see her heels through the door, so he knew she was sprinkling clothes on the veranda.

And now, touching it gingerly, he slipped a sleeve from one tiny arm, and then another and when a babe whimpered, he took it up, turned it over, and changed its place, patting it softly. There were seven on the pallet, all told, and presently there were seven little slips of pink and orange-colored prints and blue homespun in a heap, and reversing the pile, Tobe began to put them on again, "hit an' miss." He had not finished the redressing, though, when a fresh thought stopped him.

"Ef I could jes git about a half-dozen or so mo', an' drap 'em in, wouldn't dey be de

dickens to pay?" he chuckled; and he sat back on his haunches and began to enumerate:

"Lemme see. Dar's Millie Frank's chile; I know Millie ain't washin' at de spring. An' dar's Abbie Jim, she got a month-ole baby. An' dar's Mame Henry's twins. And Calline Towers's two o' de triplers livin'. An' dey's at least sev'al yo'ng babies down in de Million Boll Bottom. Ef I could—"

It was a preposterous thing to attempt, but the very risk it involved made it fascinating. He could not turn his head in any direction now without realizing the babies there were in the cabins along the line of his vision. Of course he could not be quite sure which of them might be already here, not knowing which women were at the spring. But he knew that none of the mothers of young babies were in the field, and that such as were able were expected to "put in" part of each day either at the wash-house or in the sewing-room. He remembered that a woman named Dinah Wilbor usually washed at her own

spring, and that she had a young child. In about three minutes he had muffled his face and neck, drawn up his shoulders again in a sort of wet-chicken expression, and started out in the direction of Dinah's cabin.

He found her washing under the trees at her door, as he had expected, but, as he had not expected, she saw him at the same moment, and, perceiving this, he ambled up to her, even taking a seat on the wash-bench at her side, while he told her how "po'ly" he felt—"jes too sick to live, an' not sick enough to die."

His "threatenin' chill," he declared, was just giving way to a "threatenin' fever," and he took off his coat and hat, and got Dinah to feel his forehead, which was by this time really quite hot and dry. The truth was, he had been surprised, and he was gaining time.

Dinah was a hearty soul, and she hastened to insist that he should go into her cabin and lie down. This he at first declined to do; then he reconsidered, and, remarking that the sight of the gourd dipper hanging at the door

made him thirsty for water and a nap, he strode timidly over to the window, stepping gingerly lest he should waken the sleeping dogs before the door. Dinah's half-witted sister, Silly Ann, sat within the window, shelling pease.

As he passed in, he tapped her shoulder playfully with the dipper he carried. "Hurry, Silly Ann, honey," he whispered, "an' shell me a hatful by de time I comes for 'em," and when she grinned at him and nodded, he saw hat her fingers were flying.

The baby slept upon a shawl on the bed, and the "sugar-tit," or "comforter," with which it had been beguiled into sleeping, lay, off duty, on the pillow beside it.

Tobe saw with one swift glance that the bed was beyond the range of Silly Ann's vision, and that it was beside a back window. He saw also that outside the window there was a table. He did not see that there was a basket under the table. He found that afterwards.

Before one could even think Jack Robin-

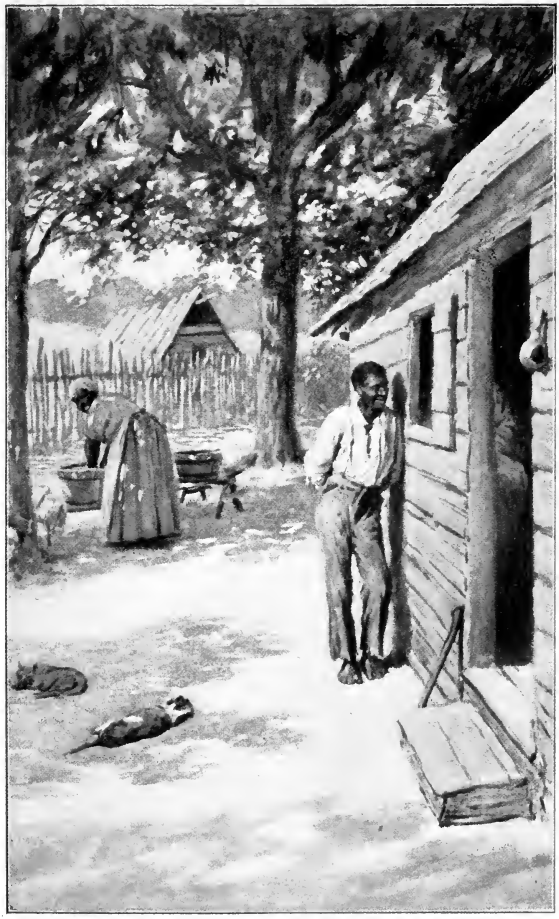
son, the baby was lying in its soft shawl on the table outside the window, its solace in its mouth, and Tobe was out the front way, straggling towards Dinah; and while she helped him on with his coat he whined: "I feels too bad to resk layin' down, thanky, ma'am; dat dipper o' water 'suaged my hot flush into a col' shiver. I feered ef I lay down I can't git up," and, trembling as if a chill were on him, he started off down the road.

When its curve took him beyond Dinah's sight, however, he turned as nimbly as a fawn, and in about twenty strides, doubling the corner of her cabin, he darted to its rear, seized the basket under the table, lay the warm bundle carefully within it, and fairly danced into the bit of pine beyond, where the twins lived. Here he found an easy opening, and the fact that there were three little babies in the basket he presently balanced on his pate did not in the least temper his spirit or modify his gait. The mother of the twins was exchanging cabbage-plants with a neighbor over a back fence.

It was clear sailing now, until he reached the mulberry grove behind the wash-house, and here he proceeded slowly. Nothing happened, though, and when he reached the door of the wash-house he stood and listened, and in a moment he saw through the window Silvy Duke dropping a sleeping child back to the pallet, and he heard her say to herself,

"I declare, seem like I kin see little Silvy grow f'om one nussin' to another!" and he felt that the play had begun.

He chuckled inwardly as he passed in by one door while she went out by another, and, darting with his basket behind the screen, he hastened to place the three additions in line, first changing their frocks, so far as he could. Of course he had not achieved all this without some embarrassment from the beginning, but by passing the "consolation" from one to another, where the need seemed greatest, and keeping his eye on Judy's feet and his ears set for the chattering down at the spring, he managed to feel tolerably safe. But he was very much excited now, and when suddenly



"HE STOOD AND LISTENED"

one of the babies set up an old-fashioned howl, he dropped it and slipped back under Judy's bed beyond the pallet. He made his escape none too soon, for in a minute he saw a pair of thin hands reach down and take up the crying child, and he heard old Tild' Ann say, "I 'clare, ef deze chillen ain't kickin' dey clo'es clean off." And presently she came again, and he suspected that she was dressing the others.

Tobe thought he was having fun, but Judy's bed, albeit it was an old four-poster and high, as beds go, was somewhat low as a roof for a young giant. He was just beginning to ask himself how much fun he really was having, and to wonder whether it might not be well to slip away and let the joke work itself out, when he heard a piercing shriek in the road. It was a woman's voice, and she was screaming: "Whar my chile? Who tuck my chile? My baby's s-t-o-l-e!" And he crawled close to the wall, and the beating of his heart shook the bed.

In a few minutes he knew that a crowd had

gathered in the road, but he could catch only broken sentences:

"Snatched out de bed—"

"—in de broad daylight—"

"—th'ough de back winder—"

"—shellin' pease—"

And then there was a lull, and he heard one say:

"Dey tell me a *gy*raffe broke loose f'om de show-tent down in Rowton's wood las' night. I wonder does *gy*raffes eat chillen?"

"'Sh—hursh," said another. "Of co'se a gyraffe 'll lop up a baby jes fer a relish when it's gittin' ready to *de*vour."

This was followed by another shriek, and Tobe recognized Dinah Wilbor's voice, and he was most unhappy. Indeed, he wanted to rush out and comfort her, but just at that moment some of the mothers came in from the spring, and several of the babies, recognizing their voices, possibly, set up rival wails, and he saw pairs of hands come and take one and another, some going directly home, and a few sitting at Judy's fire to

nurse their children and discuss the matter of Dinah's baby.

Presently he heard one say, "I wonder ef Tobe Taylor ain't at de bottom o' Dinah's trouble?" The speaker was old Tild' Ann, and she screamed from the side of her pipe into Judy's ear. Tild' Ann was a great old gossip, and whenever there was a stir in the air she hurried over to the wash-house and talked with the women.

"Tobe's went home sick," snapped Judy, in reply to her remark. "Jes 'caze Tobe wasted a few good molasses on a passel o' tar-babies las' summer, look like he's under s'picion constant. Tobe was so sick he didn't even wait to git any o' de seven-savored miasma mix I b'iled fer him."

Of course it would have been hard to come out and face this. Tobe was amiable, but he was hardly fine.

Besides, Dinah's wails had passed out of hearing, and, excepting for the occasional moment of supreme panic when the hands came down and the babies went up, Tobe soon be-

gan having a stupid time again. Wasn't it surprising how many women could come and lean over the clothes-horse, and take their babies, and depart without perceiving anything amiss?

True, the corner was pretty dark, and yet it was light enough to facilitate some sort of selection.

"I wonder huccome Polly looks so puny an' peaked to-night?' said a voice at the fire. "De chile ain't 'erse'f, noways."

"Maybe you picked up de wrong chile," said Aunt Tild' Ann.

"Wrong nothin'. I know my sewin'," sniffed the anxious mother. "Dis slip was lef' over f'om my sittin'-sun patch-work, all to de sleeves. I see you got Luce Powers's baby up."

"I picked up whichever one was squawlin' de loudes'," said Tild' Ann; "but huccome you know Luce's baby?"

"I know Luce's button-sewin'. Luce allus would sew 'er buttons on over de aidges. Lordy, but ain't her baby gittin' big! Las'

time I seen 'er she was as big-eyed an' slim-necked as a half-hatched turkey. But what yer reckon is happened to Dinah's baby? I wonder would Silly Ann hurt a chile? I don't trus' no foolishes—"

"Silly Ann been settin' in de winder fer two hours shellin' pease, an' waitin' fer Tobe Taylor to come for 'em, so Dinah say."

"Tobe Taylor! I thought Tobe was home in bed."

"Dat what dey tell me. I don' kno' nothin' 'tall 'bout dis foolishness. But one thing I know. When all dis heah talk 'bout *gy*raffes was gwine on I kep' still; but *gy*raffes, dey don't eat humans. A *gy*raffe don't no mo'n swaller a chile half-way down his neck, an' den he turn 'is head an' ca'mly glance over his shoulder, an' dat draws de neck-leaders an' crushes de chile's bones."

"Yer don't say!"

"Yas; but I didn't let on, 'caze ef it was my chile, I'd jes as lief see him et straight as turned into a Adam's apple to a *gy*raffe."

"Me too. An' dat was a fine chile o' Dinah's, too—jes as plump."

An idea had come into old Tild' Ann's head, and she talked rapidly. She leaned over and looked closely at the wee babe on the other woman's knee.

"Ef dat was my nussin' chile," she said, tentatively, "I'd drap some rusty nails in my drinkin'-water, an' maybe teck a little malt—"

She did not finish her sentence, for just here Rachel Glover came dashing in with a baby in her arms, and shrieking: "Whar my baby? Dis ain't my baby. Who put my baby's frock on dis boy chile—an'—an'—?"

At this Sarah, the anxious mother, started as if she had been shot. Then she raised the tiny child from her lap, held it at arm's-length for a second, and gave a piercing scream. And now Tild' Ann, beginning to see the light, burst into peals of laughter. "What I tol' yer?" she exclaimed. "Tobe Taylor 'ain't been possumin' round dis fire all day for nothin'."

Hurriedly seizing a bit of fat pine, she thrust it into the coals, and leading the way to the pallet, pulled back the clothes-rack. Seeing the sleeping children here, she threw herself down on the floor and rolled over bodily, shrieking with mirth.

"Whar dem fool 'omans searchin' fer wil' beasts?" she chuckled, when she finally sat up and wiped her eyes.

There was an exciting time in the corner for several minutes, each mother scrambling for her own as if she suspected the others of defrauding her.

It was scarcely maternal the way Rachel dropped the child she had brought in, and, seizing her own, darted into the night, muttering imprecations as she went. A crowd passed her just outside the door, and when they came in now one cried, "Dey's a set o' twins in dar somewhere"; and the mother of the two had already begun to dry her tears, at sight of one of her babes, but the one seemed as nothing when she saw that the other was not there. Her distress was not for long,

however, for close behind her came another, wailing, "Dis ain't my chile." It was the same old story.

As the last arrival passed Tild' Ann, sitting at the fire now, she chuckled facetiously, "Dey all been purty well picked over now, but dey's one or two lef'-overs. Dey's one puny little gal chile dar, I know. Latecomers 'bleege' to teck de leavin's!"

Tild' Ann was the only one who was having any fun out of this thing—Tild' Ann and Tobe—*perhaps*.

"Well," whined the woman, dropping the babe she held into the eager, empty arm of the mother of the twins, "I ain't on no beauty-hunt. My chile's teethin', an' she's sick. She taken de mem*bra*neous croup de las' time she was out in de dew, an' dis April-foolishness is li'ble to kill 'er."

At sight of the mother, the meagre baby of the two remaining ones began to coo and to paddle hands and feet. She was older than the others, and she knew her mother.

Without a word, the woman carried her to

the fire, and began warming her feet and passing her hands over her lovingly, and while she caressed her and gave her of her best, she smoothed the dress she wore and looked it over.

Then, presently seeing that the others were gone, she turned to Tild' Ann, and in a half-whisper said:

"Who put freckled Frances's christenin'-frock on my chile? Dis is de white slip ole mis' gien her to bury her las'-but-two chile in, an' she saved it over for a christenin'-robe. I helped lay out de chile, an' I know. Frances 'lowed she wouldn't have one o' her chillen shamin' de rest wid finery at de resurrection o' de dead. But huccome it on my baby, I like to know? Ef Tobe Taylor been—"

"I reckon I must 'a' put de frock on de chile, an' I 'spec' it fell off de clo'es-horse. De babies was half of 'em stark naked an' sneezin' dey heads off."

"Well," the mother chuckled, "you needn't to let on, but it 'll do Sister Freckles good when she lays 'er eyes on it ag'in. She stole it

f'om de dead, to begin wid, an' I didn't put it on my chile, an' I ain' gwine teck it off—not tell I git ready. I jes been waitin' to git a fine white lace frock to christen Queenie in."

Tild' Ann was filling her pipe, and as she drew a light from a live coal, she said with her underlip:

"Ef you don't want it tore off yo' chile in ch'rch, you better hurry up yo' baptism befo' Frances is out ag'in."

"Queenie gwine be baptized nex' Sunday, please Gord. Yer heah, Queen? Dis heah finery sho do become 'er." And, kissing the baby as she rose, the happy mother started off homeward.

Tild' Ann followed her to the door, and, hearing their steps, Tobe peeped from beneath the valance. He saw that Judy was snoring in her chair. It was his chance.

Creeping hurriedly on all-fours, he seized the babe that lay fretting on the pallet, laid it softly in the basket, and, darting through the door, struck out for Dinah Wilbor's

house. Dinah had been kind to him, and he had basely betrayed her hospitality. It was not this, however, that moved him so much as the agony of her haunting cry.

It was a short cut across a field to her cabin, and he knew every inch of the ground. When he got there he found everything open and deserted. Even the dogs had gone.

It was a simple matter to put the baby where he had found it on the bed, but when he stood there beside it in the dark cabin, and realized the situation, there was something in it all that made him cry.

He dared not leave the child alone lest harm should come to it, and so, not daring to light a candle, he stood guard beside the bed; and when the little thing whimpered he hummed a low tune and gave it his great, rough thumb to suck, not knowing what else to do, and feeling the eagerness of its warm, velvet lips, and then the tearful repudiation, he sobbed and laughed together, like a hysterical woman. Finally the little thing dropped off to sleep, holding his finger tight in its hand,

and even when he felt its grip gradually slacken he did not move, fearing to wake it again.

He had a long time to wait, and it was tiresome, but after a while he heard voices and laughter in the road, and he slipped his hand cautiously away and darted out the door, hiding in the vines behind the cabin.

From here he presently saw Silly Ann light the candle, and he saw the light fall full upon Dinah *and the babe she had brought in her arms.*

Chills ran down his back and beads of perspiration dropped from his forehead.

Just then a weak wail came from the bed, and he saw the expression of Dinah's face as she exclaimed, in a tone of tragedy:

"My Gord!"

She was mystified for a moment only, however, for almost in the next breath she said: "Silly Ann, run over to Jule's right quick, honey, an' tell her her chile is heah. I 'clare I wush-t Tobe Taylor could 'a' seen Jule in convulsion-fits when she fetched my chile

back to swap it, an' foun' somebody had went off wid her baby!"

She took the fretting babe up in her arms as she spoke, laying her own in its place, and, as she coddled it, Tobe heard her say: "I allus is s'picioned Tobe for a hoodoo, an' now I know it. I seen him come empty-handed, an' I seen him depart empty-handed, an' what my eyes see I boun' to believe. Tobe stopped in heah long enough to cast a spell an' waf' my chile away, dat what he done. Tricked Silly Ann into shellin' pease for dear life, so she wouldn't see him makin' passes over it. Can't fool me no longer about Tobe. Hit's a good thing Evil can't hurt Innocence, less'n de chile mought o' been kilt. And no doubt he sperited dis one heah de same way. No wonder he looked so sick to-day wid all dat deviltry brewin' in him."

Tobe felt that he had heard enough. His finger was still conscious of the clasp of the tiny hand, and he was stirred as he had never been before. Silly Ann had started out on her errand, but before she had gone a dozen

steps Tobe sprang from his hiding and called her back. Then he strode boldly into the cabin. Dinah said afterwards that she was frightened when she first saw him, and then angry, but that when she looked into his face she forgave him everything. The fellow was in tears, and he said not a word for some seconds; but presently he began emptying his pockets. "Heah, Dinah," he faltered, "I 'ain't got much—jes thirty-five cents; an' heah's my jack-knife, an' a silk hankcher; maybe you mought put it roun' de baby's neck some time; an' de knife, you can keep it for 'im; an' learn 'im to use it on me time he gets big, ef you ever heah o' me a-pesterin' little things like dis any mo'. I know I'm a fool, but I ain't no devil. Gimme dat chile o' Jule's an' lemme ca'y it back to its mammy."

EGYPT

EGYPT

HEN Mr. Arthur Pomeroy, of Roseland plantation, heard a knock at his library door he felt so sure that his coachman, Pompey, had come to say that the carriage was ready to take him to church that when he called out, in reply, "Come in!" he did not so much as lift his eyes from the columns of the New York *Observer* which he held. Indeed, he even began to say, "Well, Pomp—" when, happening to look up, he saw that, instead of his man, a thin black woman stood waiting before him.

"Well," he chuckled, "what in the dickens, Egypt? I thought you were that rascal Pompey." And he looked at his watch. "No," he yawned, "it's hardly time for

Pompey yet. Well, old girl, what can I do for you this morning? That's a mighty fine dress you've got on. Where'd you pick that up? Silk, ain't it?"

The woman had not moved a muscle while he spoke. She did not even look down at her skirts, as almost any one might have done at mention of her gown.

But when he paused, awaiting her reply, she courtesied respectfully, as she said:

"I come to hol' counsel wid you dis mornin', marster."

"Came to hold counsel with me, did you? Well, I declare! You and old man Meyers been fighting again, I suppose?" (Meyers was overseer on the place.) "Sit down there and tell me about it." He pushed an ottoman towards her with his foot, but she remained standing.

"No, sir," she drawled; "me an' Mr. Meyers 'ain't had no new 'ruptions. Hit ain't dat. But I'm tired, marster. I ain't doin' no good, day in an' day out, an' de way I'm livin', half workin' an' whole shirkin', it

can't bring me nothin' but trouble. I'm boun' to lead or lag me. I can't walk wid de gang; an' Mr. Meyers, when he ain't shovin' me, he's holdin' me back. So I come to ax you, ef you please, sir—won't you please, sir, hire me my freedom fur so much a month, if you please, sir? Jes hire me to myse'f, an' I'll step out an' git de wages."

It was a bold plunge, and when she had made it she hesitated a moment, as if to hold herself. The scheme, so far as she was concerned, was entirely original, and it represented some pretty serious thinking. "Ef you don't rate me too high," she added, presently, "I'm shore I kin mek money enough. I'm mo' of a handy 'oman 'n I is a fiel' laborer, anyhow, an' ef I don't fetch you de wages you put on me, you kin tek me back into de fiel'."

This was certainly business-like, terse, and to the point.

Mr. Pomeroy put down his paper and removed his glasses, and as he looked down at the woman—she was a tiny slip of a thing—his expression softened, and he half smiled as

he presently repeated, with evasive irrelevancy.

"Where'd you get that frock?"

"Dis frock?" She glanced down at it now. "Dis frock is de one ole Mis' gi'e me de time o' de big overflow, when I toted de chillen th'ough de water f'om de front po'ch out to de skifts. I mos' gen'ally puts it on when—when I got any p'tic'lar business at de house."

Mr. Pomeroy leaned forward and scanned the gown.

"Y-e-s," he said, presently, "you did carry the youngsters on your back through the rising water—I recollect—you were the one. It was mighty brave of you. It rose something like an inch a minute for about half an hour, and you were a plucky girl to do it. Some fellows stronger than you were swept off their feet. So you are the one. I don't see how you managed it."

"I reckon de chillen's weight stiddied me some; dat stiddied me down, an' God A'mighty He helt me up. You know, ole Mis' she prayed while I walked."

"And she gave you that brocade silk, did she? It's what they call a brocade, I believe?"

"Yas, sir, hit's a brokay—a bo'quet brokay."

"Yes," Pomeroy smiled, "that seems to describe it exactly. It certainly is a bouquet brocade if ever there was one. Regular little rose bouquets tied with ribbon bow-knots. Come to look at it, I distinctly remember mother's wearing that dress — the green fringe on the funny little open sleeve. She had a pretty arm, mother had. What did she give it to you for, do you think? Was it because you spoiled your dress in getting it wet, or—"

"No, sir, I didn't wet my frock. I tied it up. But, yas, sir, she did say she gi'e me de silk on de 'count o' me sp'ilin' my coat; but mine warn't nothin' but a ole linsey-woolsey, an' wouldn't no mo'n swunk a little mo' ef it had 'a' got soakin'. Of co'se she didn't have no call to splain out her purposes to me; but when she gi'en it to me she made me put it on

an' stan' up befo' 'er, an' she say to me, she say, 'Egyp',' she say, 'ef de time ever comes when you wants to mek a petition to any o' my people, you put on dat frock—an' ef I'm dead an' gone, you tell 'em I said so.' An' dat's huccome I took 'n' wo'e it dis mornin', marster. Howsomever, I wouldn't 'a' had de face to say nothin', 'lessen you had 'a' axed me. I know sech as dis don't become my ole head-hankcher no mo'n it do deze ole brogans. But," she added, with a chuckle and a quizzical lift of her shoulders—"but, ef I matched it wid eve'ything else, dey'd be my black hatchet face yit an' still."

Even had there been no appeal in her personality or in the situation, there were reasons why such a proposition would have been worth taking into consideration. To begin with, Egypt had always been a troublesome negro on the plantation. Not only was she difficult and cantankerous with her kind, but she was a resister of authority as administered by the stolid Meyers, who was a dolt and a dullard, as otherwise he must long before

this crisis have discovered that in the capable slave Egypt he had a woman of superior faculty, with a genius for leadership, which in a position of authority would have made her invaluable.

When he learned that she had applied in person to the court of last appeal, and hired herself out of his jurisdiction over his head, he was pretty mad for a few minutes, and swore several staccato "Gott in himmels!" while he freely prophesied that if she did not run away she would be back at her cotton row, hoe in hand, before the month was out.

But mynheer reckoned without his host. There were several considerations he left out of his calculation, besides the fundamental one that he did not in the least understand the complex woman with whom he had to deal.

How could such as he know, for instance, that there were two vital reasons why she would never run away, both reasons belonging to the inscrutable woman part of her which to him was nil? How could he suspect

that she, who had systematically eluded his authority and taken every possible advantage of him in her work during the entire period of several years while she was a resisting factor in his system of espionage and compulsion, would scorn to betray a confidence when she was trusted? How could he divine that she would rather die than leave a certain man on the place, whom she loved simply as other women love the men of their lives, and yet whom, he knew, she had repeatedly refused to marry—that is, to marry him, as she was exhorted to do, in orthodox fashion, with the benediction of the Church?

The chief trouble with Egypt seems to have been that she was a person of ideas—bothersome things for a slave woman—and one of her most stubborn ideas was that she would never marry a slave man. True, she was herself a slave, but that was just it. Had she been free, she would not have cared; but, as she expressed it, "Ef anything was to happen, either one ought to be free to foller."

During the short life of her only child, and

at the time of his death, the Church people made every effort to get her to consent to come into the fold by way of the matrimonial altar; but when even this tender episode failed to develop a vulnerable point in her resolution, they gave her up as incorrigible.

Ajax, her husband, was a slight, commonplace little fellow, whose chief energies seemed to have been employed in keeping up with Egypt in all her varying moods.

He was, taken altogether, of a lower order than she, and, indeed, seeing them together, one could not help wondering at her choice. But Egypt loved Ajax, and that was all there was of it, and in his own faithful, dogged way Ajax loved her in return. But Ajax was a fellow built for reciprocity, and it would have had to be so with him in any romance that had life enough in it to endure.

There were many things to talk over in the library that Sunday morning, even after the chief point at issue was settled. Pomeroy was an elder in the Church, and a good man

withal, and Egypt had lain somewhat heavily upon his consciousness for a long time; and now, standing as friend and adviser in the breach between her old life and the new upon which she was about to enter, he was minded to admonish her as to the relation between the deeds done in the body and the soul's felicity when it should pass out of it.

And of course he wished to know somewhat of her plans—how she hoped to earn her wages, for instance, and where.

By easy and cautious approaches he gradually arrived at a point where he was emboldened to remark that he was even glad, on some accounts, that she was going. He felt that it would be better for Ajax. Perhaps after she was gone he would in time marry some good woman and become respectable.

A look came into the woman's face when he said this—a look which he did not like to see, and which explained somewhat how it might have been hard for Mr. Meyers occasionally in his dealings with her. It was a look that, as her master, he might have re-

sented but for the appealing element in the situation and the pathetic little figure she made. She could hardly have vexed him even if she had tried, while she stood before him clad in the old brocade gown and in its story, which enveloped her as an aureole, setting her, in a manner, apart from him.

He saw his mistake instantly; and his next remark, though ostensibly in line, was a distinct retreat.

"Ajax is in every way your inferior, Egypt," he said, tentatively. "He really isn't much account. I don't suppose there's any special harm in the fellow—when he's sober; but I've often regretted buying him. He would hardly bring half his price if I were to try to sell him."

She looked up.

"How much would you ax fer 'im, ef you was to sell 'im, marster?" she asked, quickly.

"Oh, I don't know exactly. He cost me twelve hundred dollars. I bought him for his legs. A fellow with his calves ought to be a fine field-hand; but the trouble with Ajax

is he is all calf. He hasn't got any spirit. I never was so taken in in a darky. Named him, on his looks, for one of my pet heroes. Did you know that?"

Egypt seemed not to hear or to heed what he was saying; for, instead of answering, she said, "But s'posin' anybody had de money an' took a notion to buy him, how much does you reckon you'd ax fer 'im, marster?"

"Oh, seriously, I s'pose seven hundred dollars would buy him—yes, six fifty. I had a chance to sell him last year for eight hundred dollars, but I didn't do it." Pomeroy looked at the woman keenly as he added, slowly: "I didn't do it, on your account, Egypt. I wanted to sell him on your account, chiefly, and when it came to doing it—well, I just couldn't. Do you understand? You were both my reason for wishing to sell him and for refusing to do it. You have given me a lot of trouble, Egypt. I wonder if you know it?"

"Yas, sir," she said, lightly, with a characteristic shrug of the shoulders—"yas, sir, I spec' I is. Well, I'm gwine now, boss, an'

thanky, sir." She had already started to go, but she hesitated and turned back. "I ain't gwine far away, boss," she said, slowly. "An' ef—ef Ajax axes for a pass to come an' see me once-t in a while, you'll let 'im have it, won't you, please, sir? An' ef I come home sometimes to stay wid 'im over Sunday, you won't let ole man Meyers run me out, will yer?"

This was a hard petition for Mr. Arthur Pomeroy to answer—Mr. Arthur Pomeroy, elder in the Church, and standing for its honor among his people. Egypt knew that it would be hard; and when, instead of answering, he tilted back his chair and looked at the floor, she read his hesitation as a friendly omen and waived the question, parrying a chance refusal, should he have time to summon his spirit's witnesses.

"Nemmine, marster," she laughed. "I gwine strike out an' git rich, an' come back wid a pocket full o' money an' buy my ole man's freedom—some day in 'bout a million yeahs—an' den we'll have a reg'lar bridal-veil weddin'. You jes wait."

And laughing over her silken shoulder, she saw a smile upon her master's face, and she went away satisfied.

Of course the last proposition was offered as a joke. If it was indeed the desperate hope that inspired her venture, she was diplomat enough to know that she might dare submit it as a bit of bravado. By such playful finessing had she chosen to let her master know several things which it seemed well for him to know. For one thing, she had shown unequivocally that she was not going to give up Ajax; and more than that, unless he were willing to employ heroic measures—which he never did—he would be obliged to wink at it.

When Egypt left the plantation to try her fortunes in what to her was the great world, there would have been considerable stir on the place if the other negroes had understood; but it was deemed prudent that only she and her master—and of course Mr. Meyers—should know the conditions of her going. It was a dangerous precedent; or, if not, it was

one that might easily have become so. Of course Egypt's scheme was in a most extreme sense experimental, yet she had not taken a dozen strides beyond the plantation limit, with her "pass," signed by her master, pinned in her head-handkerchief, before she knew that she would never voluntarily return to the old order. There are those to whom freedom is a birthright, while some are born slaves and must needs have masters; and it is not a question of race or condition. We are all apt to believe ourselves of the first class.

Egypt was essentially of this order, and this very mental quality commended to her controlling temper her lazy, handsome, slave-caste husband.

As a matter of course, Egypt had thought out a career for herself before she actually entered upon her new life. She knew, when she walked into the little suburban town of Carrollton—since come into the corporate limits of New Orleans—just which families owned their complement of slaves, which

gave out laundering, and which hired help for special days each week.

Egypt was inexperienced, but she realized in the sense of faculty in her fingers that she was what she designated as a "handy woman." It was easy enough to get work in the beginning. The pass she carried—intended first to give her freedom in going where she would — was also available as a recommendation, and one easily verified, as Roseland was only a few miles above Carrollton.

For the first year she floated about, trying her hand at one thing and another. She liked to wash, but there was not much money in the tubs. Still, when she took part of a small shanty—renting it from a family of free negroes, with a certain section of yard and wood-shed—she set her wash-bench in full view under a fig-tree at her door, and made it the base of her operations. It was not long, however, before it became known that rough mending and tailor pressing could be had at the little shanty—well done and at

less cost than at the local tailor's. Then, later, there appeared at her one front window tempting rows of sandwiches and ginger-cakes and sticks of taffy. Egypt was wide awake, else she might not have noticed that the school-children passed her door at the recess hour on their way to the candy-shop. In the afternoons the left-overs of this stock she peddled to the laborers up on the levee for anything they would bring. At night she did her baking.

Along the side of her shanty, as a sort of lateral industry, she planted a row of artichokes, and about her back door-step there were thriving bushes of the little bird's-eye pepper, and when they were in season she added artichokes and peppers to her afternoon baskets, and in these instances she turned her face towards the more pretentious neighborhoods. Indeed, when she had learned more of the city's ways, she even ventured occasionally to take the steam-car, which carried her down to Tivoli Circle, where she peddled her wares to greater advantage, and

more than once she even had the temerity to appear in Canal Street.

Here, sitting flat upon the "banquette," she would brace herself against the outer wall of one of the stores, and calmly display her wares in an open basket upon her lap, quite as if she were one of the "regulars," and as a result was heartily despised by all of this proud class—which is to say, by the several eminently respectable creole negroes whom every one knew, and who would be missed by the best people any day they failed to appear at their several stations with their baskets of pralines and peppers. They were perhaps righteous enough in their indignation, for, as they said, if any "slave-nigger" could come in her old rags, such as Egypt wore, and thus degrade their callings, what would be the use of trying to keep up old standards? Any praline woman who understood her business and honored the traditions knew enough not to appear on the great boulevard in other than proper form—the regulation dress of beautiful flowered pur-

ple French calico, exquisite as silk, and laundered to simulate its shimmer—not by any means the second-best guinea-blue which has supplanted it — the snowy neckerchief, and starched tignon of gay plaid tied on the head with an expression of confidence and repose —the clean apron and scoured basket, and—

And above all, the *patois*. Surely let us not forget the *patois*, now French, now English, now interchangeably both — staccato, diminuendo, crescendo, but always musical, picturesque, charming.

Poor Egypt had but one speech, and it was a mongrel, having no recognition in Canal Street; and as for clothes, she had not bought a garment since she had been free to buy. But she kept tolerably clean in the ragged perquisites of her trade, so that to the close observer she was not offensive, and she gave more peppers for a picayune, a bigger cake of cocoanut-candy, a longer taffy-stick, than her more important rivals—a further offence, of course. If she had known how, she would have beat them at the praline trade; but one

has to be brought up to it to turn out a praline that tastes like a materialization of gumbo-French thought. But taffy was a plantation staple, and she was sure of herself on that. She could make it brittle or soft, or nearly white or quite yellow, or, of course, pink, or porous or heavy, twisted, braided, or straight; and she had soon learned the orange-flower trick. She got the flowers by simply accepting the courtesy of a row of trees that offered them to her over her own back fence, and when the proffered hospitality was exhausted, she climbed over and drew upon their reserves.

Egypt was going through the motions that usually mean success, and yet, to all appearances, she was very poor indeed. She never had any company excepting the school-children, who liked to stay and talk with her when they came to buy, and, of course, Ajax. He came bravely in broad daylight on the Saturdays named in his pass, and occasionally he came after dark or in the very early mornings, when the sleepy patrols accepted a

certain counterfeit pass which he carried. Egypt had gotten this important document for a small sum from an old fellow who made a business of this sort of thing, a Spanish-American, by the name of Delgado Jones, who lived back beyond the shell road, and who could "do anyt'ing wid a pen or a key."

Once or twice on his regular days Ajax failed to come, and it is said that on one such occasion Egypt slipped out to see what the trouble was, and that she found him out visiting, and invited him home and thrashed him; but this may not have been true. Certain it is, however, that after the reported difficulty he was never known to fail to turn up when he was due at the wash-cabin.

If he and his ladye occasionally dined on roast chicken on the Sundays following his clandestine visits, it was always with an assurance which satisfied the cook that the master was not the loser through the feast. If Ajax saw fit to contribute to the family larder by a little innocent marauding in his passage across the plantation contiguous to

the Pomeroys', neither he nor Egypt saw any particular harm in it. Indeed, but for the parole between her and her master in the existing situation, she would have been pleased to accept without question any booty Ajax might have chosen to fetch in to her; but so long as she carried in the handkerchief upon her forehead the paper which made her free in all her movements, and in her heart the grateful memory of how the same was bestowed in exchange for her word of honor solely, she would never conspire to defraud the giver. "Marse Artie's chickens" might have picked their way daily across her garden in these days of grateful fealty, and they would not have been molested. If she aided and abetted her lord in eluding the master's authority, it was an affair that was entirely personal; and, for that matter, the forged pass was scarcely ever used, and was gotten more as equipment for possible need than anything else—for this and the inward satisfaction it gave her. She might be ill sometime and need her man. And sometimes

things which were very interesting happened on the place, and Ajax, after dutifully going to bed in his cabin, would be unable to sleep until he should seek her out and tell her the news. For instance, he walked all the nine miles from Roseland one night to tell her that it was reported in the Mount Zion Society that she had hired her own time from her master, and was not at all, as she had led him and the rest of the people to believe, working away from home because the master had banished her. It was even reported that the sum she paid for her time was twelve dollars a month, which was exactly true.

Of course she would have confided in her lord in the beginning, but for reasons. People who get drunk are not safe, and she had not dared. It would have been much easier for her many times if some one had shared her secret and borne her company when the pressure was nearly too great, as it was sometimes—when the pressure was so great and the end so dim and far and uncertain.

It is trying to be blamed by those we love,

it is trying when honors are even, and it was pretty hard for Egypt when her irritable little man charged her with any of a lot of imputed motives, and sometimes almost abusively urged her to get up and come home, and live like a decent woman who had had quality white folks and knew what was what, instead of lying out like a half-starved free nigger, his favorite charge as to her motive being "obstropulousness" in particular, and "cussedness" in general.

Of course Ajax's abuse was never a thing to be taken seriously. It was like the fretful insolence of a child to a superior, and Egypt knew she could punish him for it and made him sorry as soon as he cooled off. Indeed, she could hurry up his cooling off if he tried her too much. And yet there were times when he was gone, and she was all alone in her cabin, when his sharp words came back to her, and she wished she were dead.

It would seem that so humble and obscure a person as Egypt might have lived her life along without suspicious scrutiny, but not so.

After a while some who had long been convinced that her master did not get all her earnings began to speculate as to what she did with them, and one day several persons in different places were saying that she was laying up money—putting it away in a little hair trunk under her bed. "Somebody" had peeped, and seen her pulling out the trunk, and lifting something heavy from it, and then cautiously shoving it back. Indeed, this "eye-witness"—how literal the word!—even went so far, one morning, as to describe a most interesting scene—a scene which she "accidentally" got through the key-hole of Egypt's door, to which she had repaired late the night before — ostensibly to buy gingerbread—at midnight nearly.

She had raised her hand to knock—so she said — when a harsh, grating sound within startled her. It was like the sharpening of a saw. She would still have knocked—she said—but that it was quicker to kneel, and the key-hole was so large, and the key turned out of the way, on duty. She would not even

then have thought of such a thing as looking through the key-hole but for the patch of light which she happened to see on her bosom just as the noise occurred, and which, being in the form of a key-hole, she recognized as an invitation.

She was a short, tub-shaped woman, especially constructed for a moonshine gossip-distillery. There are a few such in all shades of color.

The report of the secret hoard may have reached Pomeroy's ears, for he sent for Egypt suddenly about the time it arose—sent for her about the middle of the month, when he could have no possible business with her in the contract. Egypt was a good deal troubled when she went in answer to the summons. She had been several times taunted with the accusation that she was laying up money, and she had sharply resented it. If it were true, and her master should hear of it, there was nothing to prevent his raising her wages; not that she suspected that he would do this exactly; and yet she must have considered the

visit important, for when she went, in answer to his bidding, she thought it worth while to put on the old silk gown. She had no petition to make, but she might have before the visit should be over. It is true there was another reason why she may have been constrained to wear the old dress. It was that her other clothes were all rags, in which it was not fitting that she should appear before her master.

No one will ever know just what Pomeroy's intention was in the beginning, but certain it is that when his eyes fell upon the woman a change came over his face. If he had expected to question her as to her prosperity, something touched him so as to deflect the inquiry into kindly solicitude lest she was working too hard. She was very thin, he told her. Wasn't she tired of her experiment, and didn't she want to come home and rest?

This frightened her at first, and she hastened to declare that she was never better in her life. "Yas, sir, I spec' I is toler'ble

thin," she said, wanly, "but you know de ole sayin', 'de thinner de spryer.'"

"No, I never heard that before," Pomeroy laughed, "and I don't believe you have, either. I believe you made that up this minute." At which Egypt fairly doubled her thin body with laughter.

"Well, marster," she chuckled, "ef I got enough life in me to strike off ole sayin's to fit de case, look like you nee'n't to fret about me. I'm gittin' along passable, thank Gord." Then she added, more seriously: "Times is hard, it's true, marster. I'm a tur'ble boss, an' I drives myse'f purty hard. But dat's all right. 'Twouldn't do for freedom to come too easy."

It did come a great deal easier to Egypt after this, however, for the chief result of the interview was a considerable reduction of her wages.

When she finally turned to go, she was so elated that she could scarcely steady herself, and as she trod the gravel-walk that led to the gate, her loose heels catching the hem of

her silk skirt at nearly every step, she gave an occasional short skip like a girl.

She met Ajax on the road, and seeing her in a broad grin and noticing her gait, he accosted her playfully:

"I 'clare, Egyp', anybody seein' you skippin' on dem pebbles lak a yo'ng gal would think you was gittin' ready for yo' bridegroom!"

And with a toss of her little rag-tied head she replied, eying him with lowered lids over her shoulder, "*I is!*"

It was the quick retort of arch coquetry—a flash from the fire of her woman's heart—and to one who could read in it an epitome of the tragedy of her life it would have been a revelation.

If it was lost on Ajax, perhaps it was just as well.

"Is what?" he asked, curiously.

But her mood had changed. Instead of answering pertinently, she said:

"Ise a ole fool—dat what I is," and turning to him again she added, laughing: "An'

you's another. Dat's huccome we come to come togedder, I spec'."

The truth was she was too much relieved to be otherwise than frivolous.

"But tell me, what is you doin' up heah dis time o' day, shore 'nough, honey, all rigged out in dat high-water frock?" Ajax asked.

She did not answer for a minute, and then she said, with a look that made him still question her seriousness:

"Well, sence you wants to know, I come to talk to marster 'bout a Christmus gif' I'm gittin' ready for you—dat's what."

"Hursh, Egyp', fer Gord's sake, an' talk sense. Chris'mus is mos' a yeah off. Tell me what's gwine on 'twix' you an' ole boss." He took hold of her arm, and they walked along together.

"I done tol' yer, ole man, an' ef yer don't believe me, you nee'n't to. You know whar unbelievers goes." She was really almost merry.

"I ain't requi'ed to b'lieve nothin' on faith but 'cep' Scripture," Ajax said, with consid-

erable humor for him, "an' ef you can't tell de trufe, *keep it, dat's all.*"

"Well, I'll tell yer once-t mo', an' I'll tell you de Gord's trufe, an' you can tek it or leave it," she laughed again. "I been talkin' to ole marster 'bout a little business 'twix' him an' me, an' ef it turns out all right, I 'lowed maybe I mought buy a nigger to wait on you an' me nex' Christmus. Now! You satisfied?"

For answer he dropped her arm, and, turning, looked into her face.

"Is you 'stracted, Egyp'—or what?"

"Ef I'm 'bleege' to be air one, I reckon I'm *what—dat's what,*" she chuckled so giddily that the man was really uneasy.

The idea of securing Ajax's freedom by the next Christmas and of giving it to him then as a Christmas gift had popped into her head while she walked beside him down the road, and it pleased her adventurous spirit to chaff him to the very edge of the truth and then to retreat, so that when the time should come

she could recall the incident and say, "Don't you ricollec' so-and-so?" and he would have to acknowledge that he had not understood. It would be a thing to laugh over when the days should arrive when he would be free, and they should sit together in the door-step, and loaf in the sun.

Time went on, and those who noticed her saw that she was growing very gray, and that her step faltered sometimes, even when it was quickest. It was evident that she was wearing herself out.

Of course if any one, knowing the woman, had followed her career closely and sympathetically, he would long before this have become convinced that she was hoarding money for a secret purpose, and if he were discerning, he would have realized that her palpable beneficiary could be no other than her little man Ajax.

To make him a free man—thus in a sense buying for herself his eligibility—this, her timid thought at first, had grown and strengthened with opportunity and sharp-

ened faculty until it became the absorbing passion of her life. The habit of converting everything she touched into money had made her almost miserly in her meagre provision for herself, and there were sometimes whole weeks when she actually lived without spending a cent for her personal needs. There were perquisites in the sandwich and taffy trades, perquisites generally quite to her taste. What could be better than greens—nice sweet greens, to be had at almost any season in the fields, free for the gathering—boiled in the savory liquor of her ham-pot? And what better than molasses to her whose boast had often been that she had not but one tooth to her head, but that was a sweet one? Still, there were times when she would have been glad to have bread instead of ham-skin to dip in her molasses, and she never learned to relish taffy for breakfast.

Of course it was inevitable that she should fall ill. This was from the beginning only a question of time. Even the strength that

is invincible and refuses to bend must eventually break when the strain is unrelenting.

Such was Egypt's case.

When Pomeroy heard the report that she had "drapped dead at her ironing-boar' an' hadn't resurrected for two hours," he hastened to see her, taking his own physician with him.

They found her lying in bed, looking pitifully wasted and wan, and the little fellow Ajax sobbing beside her. She had been wandering in her mind, so he said, and he knew she was dying. It was evident, however, that she recognized her visitors—evident in the brightening of her eyes and the effort to raise both hands at once, as if to give them her best welcome.

But the excitement was too much for her, and an effort to speak resulted in her fainting. The doctor gave her a simple restorative, and while they waited for its effect, he assured Ajax that her condition was not immediately critical, and learned from him the particulars of her case, so far as he knew them.

It was an hour, perhaps, before she was sufficiently restored to speak coherently, and even then there were lapses; but the flicker was always clear when it came, and after a time she was able to say that she had something to say, and to beg that they would not leave her.

Her first exhibition of real control was a precautionary request, mainly expressed in pantomime. It was that Ajax should be sent out on some ostensible errand. She did not wish him to hear what she had to say.

The doctor took this occasion to write a prescription, which he said might require a half-hour to be filled, and Pomeroy gave it to the little fellow with a dollar or two, telling him to wait for the medicine and to keep the change.

Pomeroy was not exactly surprised at the story as she told it—in broken sentences—but he was embarrassingly moved by it. At her direction he presently drew from beneath her bed the old hair trunk and opened it.

Within one end of it was a pile of small bags (old stocking-legs mostly) stuffed and heavy, and at the other lay, neatly folded and covered with a ragged towel, the little brocade gown. These were all.

As he lifted the stockings to the table, he saw that she had raised her head a little and was watching him with eyes that shone like yellow fires.

As Pomeroy began to untie the first string she said:

"I'm 'feard dey's about ten dollars or so short, marster, an' ef dey is, wouldn't you be so kind, please, sir, to loand it to me, ef you please, sir, tell after Christmus? Ef I got all o' Ajax's price but 'cep' ten dollars, won't you—"

Pomeroy did not allow her to finish.

"Certainly — certainly," he interrupted, hastily, trying to steady his hand.

"You'll mek out de free papers jes de same, so dey'll hol' good, without no morgans on 'em?"

"Sh! Don't talk. Certainly—certainly."

"Dat brokay silk hit cost two hund'ed dol-

lars. I heerd ole Mis' sesso. You could hol' dat tell I pay up; but *mek de paper clair*, please, sir. Ef I was to die—I don' spec' to die, but I *mought*—Ajax 'ain't got no sense. Ef he was free all but one kink on de tip of his head, he wouldn't know enough to h'ist his arm an' clip de lock. He ain't like me. Ef I didn't have but one toe free, I'd make dat my headquarters an' go to work on de balance. So please, sir, make de paper strong. *I wants him free.*

"Of co'se, boss"—she turned her face so as to look at him directly—"of co'se I s'pose you 'ain't riz de price on 'im? He's pas' de top o' de hill, an' a ole man; he don't fetch no mo'n—"

This was really more than Pomeroy could bear.

"Certainly not, Egypt — certainly not. Whatever price I told you—whatever you understood—"

By this time the bag was untied, and when Pomeroy turned it, a heap of pebbles rolled from it to the floor.

"Count 'em," she said, but her voice went

out in a whisper and her head fell back. She had been talking too much.

The two men exchanged glances, while the doctor gave her some drops and felt her pulse. Her failure was only for a moment, and when she revived she repeated, still looking at the table:

"Count 'em, marster."

Of course she was delirious. No doubt the strain had long ago wrenched her mind from its balance, for when she saw the pebbles she again said:

"Please, sir, count 'em."

"Better humor her," the doctor said, and so Pomeroy began,

"One, two, three, four, five"—then looking at his companion—"six, eight—"

"Stop! Dat ain't right. Please count straight, marster."

She had risen to her elbow in her excitement, and was panting for breath.

"You can count one bag, an' let de doctor count another. But count straight, for Gord's sake!"

It was no task of a minute to untie and count the contents of the seven little bags of pebbles, but the men, under the scorching eyes of the compelling woman, performed it with scrupulous care, quite as if they had not known that they were humoring a hallucination. The net result was exactly six hundred and forty pebbles. When Pomeroy realized that this was indeed just ten less than the price in dollars which he had put upon Ajax six years before in the study that morning when she came to hold counsel with him, he was impressed and mystified. It was, to say the least, an interesting case.

"Dat what I thought," she said, when she knew the count. "I 'lowed I was ten dollars short, an' I would 'a' got it befo' Christmus 'cep'n' I took sick; den I was 'feard to wait. An' you say you'll loand me de ten dollars, marster?"

For answer, Pomeroy took out his pocket-book and lifted from it a ten-dollar bank-note. Then looking at her inquiringly he said:

"Or maybe you would rather have nice

round moneys like those you have been saving?"

This was a test question, and she chuckled as she answered:

"No, sir, ef you please, sir. What good would dem ten pebbles do me?"

"They would match the rest of the money, wouldn't they?"

"Not much dey wouldn't. Dey wouldn't be nothin' back of 'em. *Dey's a silver dollar back of eve'y one o' dem little stones.* Ef dey warn't dey wouldn't be no mo'n counterfeits. You see, marster, I can't read, but I kin count, an' I know a dollar when I see it. Eve'y time I'd git a dollar to put away I'd drap it in my bank an' put a pebble in de stockin'. Sir? My bank? I'm a-tellin' yer 'bout dat now. Shet de do', please, sir. Some devil mought come and slip his onvisible ear in de crack o' de do' while I'm a-talkin'."

The doctor rose and closed the door.

"You know, marster — doctor — I was 'bleege' to save stiddy an' to hide safe. An'

de oniest safe banks is dem wha' nobody but Gord an' one pusson knows about. I couldn't have no place whar folks would see me gwine often an' on. Ef anybody goes to de same spot a few times hand-runnin', some idle busybody is shore to go an' see what he gwine dar for, so when I started I made my bank, an' I 'ain't nuver is hung round it. De fust dollar I drapped in it is whar it fell, 'lessen de yethers jostled it when dey come in. Of co'se dey ain't nothin' but hard money in it.

"*Sir? Whar is it?* Ain't I tellin' yer quick as I kin? Hit's in my wood-shed, marster, dar whar it is. Ef you'll go d'rec'ly an' look behine my wood-pile you'll see a ash-pile. Well, dat ash-pile ain't no ash-pile. Hit ain't nothin' but 'cep' a few ashes an' cinders raked over de kiver of a ole wash-b'iler sunk in de ground. Whenever I wanted to put a dollar in de bank, all I had to do was to stoop down, lak as ef I was pickin' up chips, an' feel under de ashes fer de b'iler-top, an' bresh de ashes away tell I opened it jes a leetle crack, an' drap de money in."

It proved exactly as she said—to the last dollar.

It was getting dark when they had finished, and they were still talking when Ajax came in.

Egypt was first to notice that there was something wrong with the fellow. But at his first shuffling footfall she knew that he was somewhat unsteady on his feet, and when he spoke, to her sensitive ear his tongue was just a little thick; so when she had taken the medicine from his hand she said to him, as if he had been a child and she his mother:

"Go in dat yether room an' lay down, an' don't git up tell I tell yer."

It had been a mistake to give him money, especially when his nerves were overstrung, and he had naturally fallen. He never fell very deep or very far, but his moral legs were slight affairs, as they all knew.

Egypt was very thoughtful when Ajax had gone out — thoughtful and silent. Finally she raised herself and turned to her master.

"Marse Artie," she said, speaking firmly

and slowly, "I done changed my mind. Dat nigger ain't fitten to be free. He needs a marster. I tell you what I gwine do. I'll buy him myse'f. You sell him to me, an' I'll look out fer 'im an' keep him straight. He's all right so long as he don't have no chance to play fool, an' he's been mighty good, trudgin' out an' humorin' me all deze six yeahs, an' thinkin' I was jes actin' overbearin' an' contrary all de time. Heap o' men wouldn't 'a' done it. So I'll buy him; but—"

She hesitated, and a cloud passed over her face.

"But what is I talkin' about, marster? I clair forgits. Of co'se I know a slave can't own a slave. Of co'se dat won't do."

"Never mind about that," Pomeroy said, soothingly, as if he might have been speaking to one of his own children—"never mind about that. We'll fix that all right. The first thing you have to do now is to get strong, and the doctor here will take care of that. Christmas is a week off yet, and you keep

quiet, and I'll see that Ajax is detailed to take care of you until then. And on Christmas morning you and he can come up to the house together, and we can arrange so there will be Christmas gifts all round. Instead of making out his free-papers I'll just transfer him to you. I think, perhaps, in the circumstances, this will be best."

"An' me a slave, marster?"

It was just a little hard for Pomeroy to find his voice for a second. Then he said:

"There will be two papers, little girl. Yours will be a free-paper, made out in your own name—"

"'Long wid Ajax's, please, marster? My name 'll be Mis' Egyp' Telamon." For the first time she began to sob.

"Well, that means— Suppose I were to have the minister there in the library on Christmas morning, Egypt?"

"Y-yas, sir. Of co'se. But—but de oniest frock I got to wear is dat same ole brokay. You reckon hit would do—fer—a weddin'?"

"I should like you to wear it when I give

you the paper, Egypt. I wish I had done it long ago. You'll have to forgive me."

"Well, I'll put it on, Marse Artie. I reckon hit 'll do fer a weddin'-frock fer a ole 'oman lak me—wid a little white wreath an' veil."

MILADY

MILADY

T began the day she was born. In fact, the old yellow woman, "Granny Fetchem," when dressing her for the first time, was heard to exclaim from her mouthful of pins:

"Look out, Milady! Look out how you h'ist dem proud eyebrows at me—'fo' you heah fifteen minutes!"

Then, an hour later, while she lifted the little one, sound asleep, from the safe edge of her short lap and laid her under the patchwork beside her mother, she whispered:

"Lucindy, honey, dis is de purties' gal chile you got, but look out for 'er. Fus' thing you know, you'll be takin' orders f'om dis chile. She 'sputed my will three times 'fo' I could

git 'er dressed, an' got 'er way every time, too. Jes' look at 'er now, sleepin' wid 'er little fus' finger p'inted up agin' 'er cheek, same as a white mistus. She's a beauty, but ricollec' what I say: look out for Milady! She'll lead you a dance!"

So, pending a later decision, they began calling her Milady.

It takes considerable maternal prevision to have a name ready for a seventh, after six consecutive daughters, especially in the face of an invincible paternal faith in the every time impending son. So, when she arrived, after Mary-Marthy and Queen Anne and Lillie-Belle and Frances Cleveland and Centennial Susan and Hunyadi Janos, she might have had to wait a bit but for Granny's timely suggestion.

The picturesque two-year-old preceding her, she of the unusual name, Hunyadi Janos, had got her "entitlement," so her mother said, from a "queen o' the saddle," otherwise a "circus-lady," whose portrait for a long time adorned the court-house wall.

This lady, taken in the act of a champion feat of bare-back riding, was innocent of more than an accidental relationship with the poster which she overlaid. Indeed, excepting that she had been pasted several inches too high, well, her name would not have been one to conjure with for the space of a generation at least, in the plantation circles of Bayou l'Écrevisse, Louisiana.

The babe in question became familiarly either "Honey" or "Jane," according to the mother's temper or the little one's behavior, Honey enjoying many a caress while Jane was apt to have trials.

But this is Milady's story.

Before she had borne her dainty name a week, it was hers "for keeps," through its simple fitness.

Milady was scarce six months old when she exhibited a marked distaste for dirt—a most interesting and abnormal trait. She would often make a wry face and hold up her shapely wee hands to be washed under provocation so slight as to be resented by the practical mother.

As a toddler, she loved the feeling of shoes on her tender feet, and by the time she was six, fans and parasols were her especial delight.

A ruffled gown quite changed her gait as she walked to church; and, indeed, she knew this quite well, for when she and her companions played together in the barn, she often "played lady" by strutting before them with various steps which she would name in this way:

"Dis heah's my bo'quet-frock walk!" or,

"Watch my pa'sol gait!" or,

"Now see me work my fan!" All done empty-handed, of course. The "bo'quet frock" she had evolved entirely from her imagination, and she had never owned either fan or parasol in her life.

Her *pièce de résistance* was a performance combining all these features, and in this she would step out before her audience—generally barefoot and ragged—and, with a bow, announce herself thus:

"Now you see me standin' up in my bo'quet frock—now watch whilst I h'ist my pa'sol—

an' work my open-an'-shet fan—an' lead a little poodle-dog like Miss Ge'ldine's by dis ribbin—an' dey's a little nigger gal jes' like me walkin' behind myself to wait on me."

Then she would start off, and with remarkable pantomimic art go through the performance, even to stopping occasionally to call over her shoulder to "the little darky behind herself" to pick up her fan or to relieve her of the dog.

Of course, Milady came in for a good many trials. There were occasions when her fastidiousness made things difficult for her mother, too, as, for instance, in the simple matter of corn-bread, which everybody knows to be a regular all-day plantation staple. Milady tried to like it, but she could not. She complained that "it choked her throat up" unless it was warm, and then, when her mother, thinking to please her, would leave a "hunk" in the oven for her, while she went to the field, it would become "too sawdusty an' cripsy," and would tickle her palate and get things so disarranged along her throat

that poor little Milady was often seen going about with the tuft of hair on the top of her head tied so tight that she could scarcely blink, this being the universal plantation treatment for the disorder which the little girl so pathetically described when she said:

"De almonds o' my ears is down."

When she was old enough to go to school, Milady continued to develop along characteristic lines. In her early spelling days, while her class was obediently satisfied to spend long hours over such words as cat, rat, bat, and hog, dog, frog, she very soon protested:

"Please, ma'am, I wants to spell some'h'n' I likes, please, ma'am! I gits tired o' all deze varmints—frogs an' rats an' bats—I'm skeered of 'em!"

And when the teacher, much amused, asked what she would like to spell, she replied without the slightest hesitation, even batting her eyes with pleased excitement:

"Angel chorus—an' heavenly mansions—or farewell forever—or, maybe, sky-blue eyes an' curly hair."

Now, this pedagogue, Miss Patience Alberta Pomeroy, was a New England missionary who, for devotion to an ideal, had left her palatial home behind her lame sister's millinery shop in Watchahotchie, Vermont, to devote her energies to the redeeming of such as the wee maid, Milady, and one would suppose that she might have been a bit indulgent; but there seemed to be much at stake in the way of discipline, and so, instead, she only cleared her slender throat while she remarked that Milady was "too many for her," and proceeded to admonish her to speak never again without permission. She did presently soften sufficiently, however, to assure the child that all that advanced spelling must begin with the learning of such words as cat and bat and rat, whereupon Milady replied, under her breath but yet audibly:

"'Tain't so!"

"Do you want I should chastise you? Repeat what you said," came in a real ferule voice from the desk.

"I say, it's hard to b'lieve dat's so," suavely replied Milady, in velvet tones.

Still, she went obediently, if reluctantly, back to the "varmints," wearily hopeful of better things; but while she spelled "p-i-g, pig," she would be thinking of "sky-blue eyes and curly hair," and so her progress was necessarily somewhat retarded.

But, finally, a day of happiness arrived. Milady, studying her lesson in the cabin door, suddenly jumped up, and, running to the hedge, cut a wild rose, and, putting it into a tomato-can, set it up in the window, and all the long afternoon she sang to it. It is true she sang only a spelling-lesson, and one word at that, but she sang with delight, for the word was "R-o-s-e, rose," over and over again, her tune an uncertain childish improvisation, but sweet as the humming of the bees or even the bird-songs which were the rose's old familiars. At last Milady had found an end in spelling—an end which was beauty.

It was hard for her when her mother came home and threw the flower away, vase

and all, and boxed her because she had forgotten to put the cabbage and bacon to boil—but it was hard for mother, too.

Although she had been slow in "catching on," as the saying is, at the end of a second term Milady was the best reader in the first-reader class, and, more than that, she was the only one whose ideas seemed punctuated with interrogation-points, so that she had become doubly trying to Miss Patience Alberta Pomeroy, who was not only what might be called a rote teacher, but a person of rigor as well.

The winter of life, as it is diffused in the snow-white, green-mountain State, had entered into her veins with her growth and her sudden plunge into a summer-country, with an ultra-tropical product for material upon which to practise crystallized theories—

Well, it was an experiment.

She called Milady's mother "Mrs. Smiley," and drank a cup of tea with her in her cabin. In fact, Miss Pomeroy did in all things her best and remained true to her

first enthusiasms long after they might have cooled in a bosom of less ardor than hers.

But, again, this is Milady's story. And it ought to be a happy one—the story of a simple, beauty-loving child—since we are so often reminded that the world is full of beauty and that all one has to do is to put forth a hand to possess it, or, even withholding the hand, to command it with eye or breath.

This is all very well in the abstract—and for the theorist—but a child reaching eagerly for a poison-painted toy or a rose with its inevitable thorn, wants only the toy or the rose, and whether he gets it or not, there is trouble.

Milady was fifteen and a brown beauty, when, putting forth her hand for a bauble—a rose, even a bouquet of roses, if you will—she got it.

It was a gay flowered gown, bought with her secret savings from the gathering of pecans—a cotton print covered with roses pink as nature's own, which climbed in a

"'YOU AIN'T NO KITCHEN WINDER!'"

wilderness of stems and leaves all over her lithe person. When Lucindy first saw it, her scathing ridicule was witty and hard to bear. But Milady met it with a fine, good-natured bravado.

"What you doin' wid dat curtain-caliker frock, gal? You ain't no kitchen winder!" So Lucindy exclaimed as the girl danced into the family circle in all her roses, and the laughter which greeted the mother's sally was only overcome by a persistent and fascinating performance, in which the girl stepped and posed so rhythmically that presently the children were all singing and beating time for her; and when she finally dropped into a chair fanning herself with a pie-pan, she was mistress of the situation.

The dress had been made by a "poor white lady" in the neighborhood, who was glad to pay for her corn-bread and molasses in this way.

Flounced to the limit and "carried off" in fine form, the rose gown was a great success. Indeed, when Milady strode down the road

in all her glory and with her old-time "bo'-quet-frock gait," whether she knew it or not, she was, as all agreed, "hard to beat."

Of course she had lovers galore—as thick "as bees about a honey-pot"; but while she sweetened under their buzzing, she appeared to care for none more than for all.

Her fitful upward reaches were only in the direction of beauty or pleasure. Miss Pomeroy had, it is true, impressed her with several facts which were in a sense wholesome, even education—alas, for instance, how clean one could keep on an infinitesimally small daily use of soap, and how alert on what Lucindy had dubbed "toy cookies and thimble jam," the last referring to the measure of the sweet. But Miss Pomeroy had in the main spoken in an unknown tongue, as she finally realized, no doubt; for after three years of vain pursuit of a laborer's best reward, she returned whence she had come, and, it was said, applied for appointment to a missionary post in China or Japan.

Pleasure-loving as she was, and idle, Milady

was yet a good little girl. Not good as a horse, perhaps, to fetch and carry, but rather as a fawn or a bird, playful, unthinking, meaning no harm.

It was not her fault, surely, that almost coincident with the making of the flowered gown there began a great revival of religion on the plantation. Not that the gown and the revival need have clashed, for there were great patches of color along the mourners' bench marking the sackcloth attitude of souls as blithe and as young as Milady's. It was not that. It was that Milady, who was the greatest dancer on the river, had in sailing out in her new gown unwittingly inaugurated a formal "rose dance" which had taken the coast by storm.

She danced it with a garland of roses, from which at will she would select a single flower, which she threw to him whom she thus selected as her partner.

The garland served for the expression of a thousand winsome coquetries, and when every other use of it was exhausted, she would

skip it as a rope; then, grasping both ends together, she would throw it into a loop, through which she nimbly passed.

It was a fascinating performance, and the fact that it was in full swing just at the time when sinners were falling thickest under gospel fire, a stone's-throw away, caused great solicitude among the brethren. Milady had always been a favorite with the ministers who had come to the plantation to preach, for from her early youth she had been the family show-piece, and she was ever pleasing.

"I kin *talk* a-plenty," Lucindy would say, deprecatingly. "But seem like I ain't nuver is had time to learn how to *converse*." Then, begging her guest to "excuse her back," she would step to the door and call:

"Mi-la-day! Whar Milady?"

And the girl, slender, modest, beautiful, would come slowly in, filling all space with a matchless grace of youth and simple being. Her words were few, but how refined her "I declare!" or, "I cert'n'y is surprised," or, "Dat's perfectly discredible."

When she used expressions like this last, or while she held her tea-cup with little finger aloof, Lucindy would apologize for her own apron and clear her throat and realize a certain store-bonnet in her bandbox—a bonnet which Milady had made her buy, thereby raising her socially a full degree above those whose best head-gear is the kerchief of plaid.

There is a show member in most families, one who, figuratively perhaps, but none the less truly, wears the roses and "converses" while the others do the plain talking in working garbs.

All through the revival the church had kept a disapproving eye upon the leader of the opposition, and if the presiding bishop—'Piphany Paul by name, a splendid bachelor fellow from Avoyelles—had not sought Milady for personal appeal, it was not for want of concern.

Certainly he had not failed to observe her out of the corner of his eyes as she sat in her roses among the boys and girls where waving

fans were thickest, near the door. But, although he had bravely hurled invective in her direction, he had personally kept his distance. Now, for the sole reason that he had kept away, Milady would have had him come, if only to warn her of the error of her ways.

No man had ever passed her by in this fashion before. And as for 'Piphany Paul, it is likely that no woman had previously so defied him.

If he had kept her figure in sight more than once as he walked behind her down the road, if, screened by the Cherokee hedge, he had passed her cabin in the early mornings, honestly seeking disenchantment, none but himself knew it—himself and God.

So the revival went forward at one end of the plantation, and at the other Milady kept on dancing.

As is often the case with those who sit in judgment, the ministers who most opposed the dance had never seen it—that is, in its present malignant form—and so when one of

their number proposed, at the close of a meeting, that they should repair in a body to the clearing where Milady was announced to lead off in the rose figures, that they might be more intelligent in their denunciations, even the usually resourceful bishop could find no word against it. There were five preachers, all told, and as they approached the dancing-green they separated to avoid notice, mingling as they could with the crowds who sat or stood in groups on the border—all but the bishop, whose timidity kept him in partial hiding behind the uncertain screen of the sparse fringes of a row of weeping-willows which flanked the ground on one side.

The dance had not yet begun, but the musicians were "tuning up," a signal to be ready, at which everybody, even the dancers, excepting Milady, found seats among the spectators.

Expectancy thus invited, the music began —a slight staccato picked upon strings, so exactly suggestive of the measured trip with which the girl in all her roses stepped upon

the grass that it almost seemed to lift her and bring her in.

The dancing-space lay in front of a dense thicket, and one of Milady's tricks was to appear unexpectedly each time from different parts of its solid wall of green. As she came out to-day from the very centre, dangling her wreath limply before her as a rope, and with her face slightly lifted, there was an ineffable quality about the girl that was most disarming. Her light rhythmic step was scarcely a dance, and surely in her childish face there was no trace of self-consciousness. Indeed, there was something so winning in her absolute simplicity—the perfect obedience with which she followed each suggestion of the strings, as if she were a feather blown, drawn, twisted, whirled by a rhythmic wind — that every eye followed her, and the spectators were breathless lest a jar should disturb the perfect harmony.

There were difficult steps, but so easily were they taken that after each special feat, which

old dancers appreciated, a sort of gasp came from the crowd.

The rose garland had no part in the first figures, but presently Milady flung it carelessly over one shoulder, at the same time lowering her glance as she swept the crowd of faces before her. So she danced, back and forth, around and across, until a single figure in the audience—a man's and an elder's at that—was discovered to be almost imperceptibly keeping time with her, and it was plain that through sudden caprice she had marked him for her own. It was as subtle as the response of a bird charmed by a cat, and its progress was as sure if as slow.

For a single second at this discovery a hilarious outburst of mirth was imminent, but this was averted in the nick of time by a warning "'sh!" from a man sitting near the front.

Milady always played with her victim with youthful recklessness, and as the good brother who had fallen under her spell could not know that the first called was rarely chosen,

it was funny to witness the look of flattered anticipation upon his old face.

It had been her habit thus to "call" one and another before she would finally throw the rose and take her partner. But to-day her scheme was even more daring.

Deacon Brown was too rapt to perceive, as he bent and swayed, even took an occasional hitching step in answer to her demand, that presently Elder Smith, quite within his visual range, and Deacon Peabody, a trifle behind him, were both likewise responding. How might one man know that while she turned away—to shift a step or to throw in a figure—that she was taking another in tow? And how might the second, with his infatuated eye glued to its object, perceive a third and even a fourth?

Only he to whom it was mysteriously given ever discovered the secret "call" by which she engaged one after another for the honor of selection, and certainly he who received it could do no less than declare himself her slave.

Her achievement to-day was rather remarkable, for certainly there were at one time three middle-aged and old men—three ministers of the gospel, all come to scoff—who were hopelessly in her toils, all swaying in time as she led, all charmed to the point of dazed obliviousness to their surroundings, when, finally, with her prettiest motion and her first real smile, she plucked a rose, lifted it lightly to her lips, and threw it—blushing, to be sure, but with the sure aim of the marksman—quite over the heads of all the three, and beyond, through the willow fringe, into the very hand, lifted to catch it, of the smiling bishop.

This was all so sudden that for a moment the people were dazed, and it was only when the man of God, bearing the rose triumphantly aloft in his right hand, stepped from his hiding that the full meaning of the manœuvre came to them, and they burst forth in screams of laughter. As he came clearly into sight, great drops of perspiration upon his brow showed that he too had been for some time

among the "called," and had faithfully danced in his tracks, awaiting the final bidding.

As he danced forward now, stepping gingerly but never losing time while he nimbly avoided the women and children sitting upon the ground, the other ministers exchanged glances. They suddenly knew themselves betrayed. One was so disgusted, indeed, that he hastened away, muttering imprecations of ungodly sound. Another had discreetly retired early in the dance, at the first sniff of danger.

The bishop's dance on the greensward with Milady for partner was a beautiful achievement. Ever yielding her the initiative, he yet echoed her every note as she interpreted the music of the strings. Indeed, his courtly grace and the certitude with which he lent himself to the following of her most intricate steps were suspiciously reminiscent of rather recent unregeneracy. But this was natural enough, as the bishop was the youngest of the lot—and if he had danced at all, even in

his callow days, he had scarcely had time to forget.

While he and the rose-girl danced together in the eyes of their little world, when astonishment and mirth had spent themselves, the general verdict was, to quote the vernacular:

"Right or wrong, dey sho does make de handsomest couple dat ever is stood together in grace or danced in sin!"

This grand culmination took place on Saturday afternoon. The new bishop's next engagement to preach was on the following day, at about the same hour, and the freely expressed opinion was that he would never have the face to preach here again.

When the rose dance was over, although the "festival" went on, other dances following, with the usual promenading and treating to soft drinks, it was with lagging interest, for even personal romances can wait in view of a prospective *cause célèbre*, and when the bishop and Milady were seen to stroll away in the direction of the river-bank, and to sit down in the shade of an oak, curious eyes fol-

lowed them, and it very soon seemed more fun to walk in their direction, however indirectly, than even to dance or find their own shaded retreats.

It was most exciting to observe that they sat close together, and that the bishop took her fan quite as another might have done—and that he fanned her even though a fine breeze stirred the garlands of Spanish moss which trailed about them.

The sun went under and the moon came out, and still they sat and talked, and when finally the good man escorted her to her father's door, he was seen to stop and to pay his respects to the family, as it was fitting that he should do.

Early the next day the two went to walk again, and, as Lucindy, who stood in the door dressed for callers, proudly explained, "to converse."

Seven plantations were looking on, and excitement ran pretty high by the afternoon hour when the bishop was obliged either to keep his appointment or to repudiate it. Of course

the chapel was overcrowded. Even the dancing contingent, generally out in couples during this service on Sunday afternoons, was there in a body.

The bishop was the last of the preachers to arrive, and when he walked in late with Milady on his arm, and in his finest ministerial form led her to a pew which was suspiciously near the mourners' territory, the case instantly took on new color. Perhaps, after all, the man of God had been working in the interest of her soul—

Bishops are perhaps of all men the most forgivable, in any imaginable circumstance, and when one in addition to being a bishop is handsome and a bachelor—

When the good man stepped up and seated himself behind the pulpit, and decorously bent his head for silent prayer, a large number of his people, long ago steeped in devotion to him, were ready to swing to his defence.

Fortunately for the situation, the brother who had been appointed to open the service

was he who had turned his back upon the tempter, and thus escaped unsullied, so that he was able to raise his voice now without deprecation or quaver.

Milady's modest deportment during this initial service was so impressive as to strengthen the bishop's cause. She was not much of a singer of hymns, but she knew the tunes and she held an open book and even "found places" in others and passed them along to acquaintances in the pew, people who, she knew, could not read a letter—very good manners, indeed.

Of course, everything preceding the bishop's part in the services—sermon, defence, whatever he might offer—was patiently borne only as unavoidable preliminary. Quite a respectable contingent of serious worshippers sat, mild of exterior, perhaps, but the placidity was that of forbearance. They had come to demand an explanation.

'Piphany Paul never looked more solemn in his life, never more serenely and yet reverently sure of himself than when, his hour

having at length arrived, he came forward, and laying his folded hands upon the open Bible, began to speak.

"Befo' de sermon dis evenin'," he began, "I wishes to give out a few notices, an' befo' I 'nounces de notices I craves to say a word to my people, which I beseech 'em to carry to de Lord in prayer."

This was fine. It sniffed of apology. The silence which already existed was almost disturbed by a suffocating stillness which followed these words. The bishop was a man of long and eloquent pauses, and when he had held the stillness in hand, as it were, to his need, he finally said:

"De last 'nouncement on my list is de one I'm gwine to read first. An' dis 'nouncement is a double 'nouncement.

"First, it is dat Miss Milady Smiley, a child born an' riz right heah 'mongst de brethren, is consented for me to 'nounce out dat she is on de waitin'-list for grace. I been wrastlin' wid de Spirit all night in prayer for her soul, an' on'y dis mornin' is she come th'ough

enough to say de word. But she don't want to be cramped nor hurried. She craves to enter de waitin'-list as a seeker, but she wants to seek in secret for a little while.

"An' now, de second part is dis:

"I'm proud, by de grace o' Gord, to 'nounce out to you dat dis same yo'ng lady is my ingaged, pledged, 'fianced - together bride-elected."

Then closing his eyes while he lifted his arms, he said,

"Let us pray."

Even though a sea of heads seemed to bend at once, it was necessary to wait a moment for order before he began in a low tone to say "Our Father—" And when this was done—and before the end was reached the congregation followed as with a single voice —it seemed best to let it go at that, with a solemn "Amen."

"And now, beloved," he resumed, "sence I done told you de last news fust, I must go back an' ketch up—so as to splain out all dis mixtry an' confusion an' wondermint.

"I see befo' me to-day a crowded chu'ch, all humans, accordin' to de way Gord created man an' woman in de beginnin'. All de brethren an' sisters who sets befo' me to-day is either *married* or *been* married or *hopin'* to be married; an' maybe a few Gord-forsaken ones is sorry dey married—but dey don't count.

"I say love an' marriage is de fiery furnish o' human life, an' ef any man heah is ever passed th'ough de fiery furnish o' love for a woman—don' keer ef his name is Shadrach, Meshek, or Abednego, or jes plain Tom or Dick—dey's been a time when *ef it was necessary for him to do so he'd 'a' been willin' to go to hell for her.*

"NOW, DAT'S JES MY CASE!

"A man is a man, don't keer ef he's a elder or a preacher or a bishop, or whatever.

"For three endurin' weeks I been wrastlin' wid dis love an' tryin' wid all my power to squench it. Den, when it wouldn't go, I agonized by public urgin' an' secret prayer to Gord to lift up de soul dat matched wid

my soul to de level o' grace—de way a bishop o' de kingdom would nachelly do—so we mought meet on de Lord's ground.

"But de Lord, He works His mericles in His own way. When I went down yesterday to de dancin'-ground, I went wid my eye set for a sign, an'—well, you knows de rest.

"To a man wid his heart in his throat, waitin' for a sign, a rose flung from de hand he loves into his is sign enough. Stars an' all de wondermint of de heavens wid sun an' moon all sailin' th'ough space, one answerin' whilst de yether calls, ain' no sweeter mericle 'n what you-all seen when Love was floor-manager on de green.

"An' as for de rose dance dat we-all been abusin' so, hit ain't nothin' but child's play.

"Accordin' to de rules o' sin an' damnation, hit ain't sca'cely what you'd call a dance, nohow. Hit's mo' like what you mought call a music-chase for a flower. You-all done seen dat proved. You knows dat de good brothers in de Lord wha' been standin' for

'ligion an' righteous livin' all deze years, dey wouldn't 'a' scandalized de chu'ch by answerin' de call de way dey done, lessen dey had 'a' seen dat it was de call o' innocence.

"De on'iest wrong I kin see in what dey call de rose dance is dat it had maybe better not been danced endurin' o' religious services. An' maybe, to save scandalizement, it mought even be jes' as well not to call it a dance, nohow. Dey ain't no dizzy waltz to it—no onseemly huggin'—or p'omiskyus layin' on shoulders—no crossin' o' feet.

"Now, dis explanation o' de rose dance ain't on my own account, for I des' now tol' yer dat, so far as I'm concerned, it wouldn't make no diff'ence to me if I'd 'a' been requi'ed to go to hell for her—I'd 'a' went—in joy—for de fulfilment o' de love which Gord A'mighty done benedicted my heart wid.

"But for de jestification o' de brethren in de Lord—all Gordly men in de fold—I permounces de rose dance a pure little game o' chillen's play. Dat's all. Of co'se, dey seen

it so, an' dey didn't scruple to play it wid de chile, jes' de same as we-all jines in play wid de chillen when de day's work is done.

"An' now, to prove my words, I done brung de rose lady into de sanctuary dis Sabbath day, arrayed in all de raiment which we so ign'antly denounced. An' you-all knows I wouldn't dast to bring my beloved into de temple o' de Lord dressed in de uniform o' sin. I wouldn't dast to do it. But a yo'ng gal wid a blossomin' rose to match her for innocence an' beauty is a symbol fitten to enter de sanctuary o' de Most High.

"Of co'se, we's all full o' faults—an' de lady o' my ch'ice, she ain't free from sin. Ef she was, she wouldn't be no fitten pardner for yo' bishop. Dey ain't no perfec' perfection heah below. Every rose is got its thorn, an' ef it didn't have, dey wouldn't be no humans fitten to gether it. In heaven, we'll have thornless roses an' humans freed from sin worthy to pick 'em from de gyardens o' de Lord—roses bloomin' by de shores o' de river o' life as it flows down to de jasper sea.

"An' now, sence my ch'ice is been made public, an' dey's been consider'ble talk, back an' fo'th, I wants all three o' de ministers wha' swung to de rose dance to stan' up beside me now, wid de little gal in line—an' whilst we all together sings ' Shall we gether at de river?' let de congergation pass up an' give us all de good right hand o' fellowship."

This was a bit sudden, and yet it was compelling in its exhibition of an invincible faith in his own powers and in the strength of his position.

There were not a few women who had been setting their caps for the bishop. Indeed, the talk was that the lovelorn of six plantations had fairly wallowed upon the mourners' bench for his sake, and it was a bit trying, no doubt, for them to see him suddenly borne away by the one girl who had recklessly defied him. This was her attitude whether defiance were in her heart or not.

So, when a rich soprano raised the hymn, more than one, seeing that it was Lucindy who had led off from the front pew, held aloof.

But the wave of returned allegiance was greater than any petty dissent, and ere a second stanza was begun even those who had had the severest suspicion were loudest in their song.

It was a great occasion, but to none was it quite the triumph that it was to the proud mother, Lucindy, whose face was one wide beam of pleasure. She lingered at the church door while the crowds passed out, so as to lose not a word of congratulation which was "coming to her," and when she finally waddled out with several of her cronies, the old woman Granny Fetchem rested on her cane at the gate to say:

"Ricollec' what I tol' yer de day she was born? Didn't I say she'd lead you a dance —an' 'ain't she done it?"

"Yas, she sho is," replied the mother, "an' it ain't no scrub dance, neither. She's one sweet chile, she sho is. Little I thought when she balanced dis store-bonnet on my head an' made me buy it dat she was toppin' me to be mother-in-law to a bishop."

She tossed her head proudly as she spoke,

"'RICOLLEC' WHAT I TOL' YER DE DAY SHE WAS BORN?'"

and the brilliant plaid of her headkerchief flapped under her hat-brim in artless contrast to the great bunch of purple flowers which bloomed there.

"For a June weddin'," she added, thoughtfully, in a moment, "I reckon I mought take off dis hankcher an' wear de hat straight—widout takin' cold."

"June, eh? Dis is de last week in May, now. Dey ain't lossin' no time. Dey say dey gwine marry in June?"

"Milady, she set de day. He give her her ch'ice, betwixt May or June, an' she taken June—an' he say dey mus' have it in de first week, so dey kin dance de rose figur out on de green whar she flung him de flower."

"You don't say dey gwine dance de rose dance ag'in, is dey?"

This in an excited whisper.

"No, dey ain't gwine to, say, *dance* it. Dey jes gwine *play* it—an' Milady, she say she gwine fling de rose to her daddy—but I reckon she was jes a-sayin' dat to pleg de bishop."

THE ROMANCE OF CHINKAPIN CASTLE

THE ROMANCE OF CHINKAPIN CASTLE

OLLOWING the passage of royalty there is usually a rural blossoming of royal names. A score of years ago, after he had come a-visiting, the name of a certain noble Russian was in the air, and more than one innocent babe, sleeping in its cradle under the trees, swallowed it, in whole or in part, according to circumstances.

Along the route of the royal train that bore the Russian boy across the continent to the haunts of the buffalo and of the army of the frontier there are to-day Afro-American voters galore answering to such high-sounding names as "Gran'-Duke," "Duke Alexis,"

and "General Custer," famously associated with the Duke at the period, and not a few composites where both names find euphonious if sometimes veiled expression, as in the case of a certain postmaster registered on the government pay-roll as "General Custer J. A. Johnson," the initials "J. A." artlessly doing duty for "Juke Alexis."

The hero of this little sketch is of an almost inky black as to complexion, and he "stands six feet" on week-days—which is to say, in his bare feet. His name, or, to borrow the vernacular, his "baptized name an' full intitlemints," is "Grand-Duke Alexis," so correctly written upon a certain tax-receipt of which we shall presently hear, but rendered frankly in plantation circles as "Gran'-Juke Alexius."

Duke was six months old, and had already been named John Henry Indigo Columbus, a name his mother had found in her own head and fondly laid upon his, when the incident occurred which precipitated the change and inaugurated his "distinguishment" in life.

There are not many babies, black or white, who can claim to have been named by village acclamation, as was the tiny black "'Lexius" of Chinkapin Turn. It happened this way:

When the special train which was bearing the royal party westward was switched off at "The Turn," and for a half-hour awaited there the passing of the Lightning Express, the whole town came out, hoping "to see what a live duke looked like."

Such as could not find standing-room near the open door of a certain coach either fell back in the crowd, content simply to be there, or climbed to vantage-points more or less distant, as the fences and telegraph-poles. Even the roof of the station presented a grinning line of variously colored boys, who swung their bare feet over the heads of the crowd. A few, driven back, seemed to value the simple fact of proximity, and hugged the train even when the slanting embankment robbed them of any chance of seeing more than its wheels and under-gear.

Among these was a slender little black woman who bore upon her arm a wide-eyed six-months-old babe. There was no one in all the crowd, probably, who was quite so humble as poor Becky Backslide and her baby — no spectator's position meaner than hers, down so low at the rear end of the coach.

She did not even try to see, nor did she look pleased—or displeased. It was a free country, and it suited her to come and stand with a brave stolidity wherever a crowd came and stood—and to hold her own, which is to say, her baby.

But the infant was enjoying things. He was no respecter of persons, and he smiled promiscuously on the just and on the unjust, and even crowed aloud as he impartially offered the great green cucumber pickle with which he regaled his "teething appetite," and with which, betweentimes, he combed his mother's head and wiped the dusty outside of the coach.

After a while, attracted by the hiero-

glyphics left by the tracings of the wet pickle, he grew ambitious, and throwing back his head, reached upward for a bold stroke, when he happened to see a face in the window above, whereupon he instantly forgot his drawing, and laughed to the face within, and offered it the pickle through the pane. In a second the sash flew up and a pair of strong hands lifted the baby, pickle and all, into the royal coach. The mother, a slight, mercurial creature, had intuitively caught the friendly spirit of the act, and before the crowd had realized what had taken place she was facing them with a bland smile, and serenely fanning herself with the baby's pink calico sun-bonnet.

In a shorter time than it can be written even the people in the wagons behind the station knew that Becky Backslide's baby was in the Grand-Duke's car, and the boys on the roof were ducking their heads to see him passing from one to another, and bravely offering his pickle, and bawling aloud when any one pretended to take it.

When at last the bell rang and the boy dropped from the window back into his mother's arms, he clasped a silver dollar in his right hand, and the gathering up of the pink slip into a lap for the accommodation of sundry cakes and fruits left his ebony lower body quite beautiful and bare.

It is really most uncertain whether the royal Russian laid his hand upon the black baby or not, but it was said by some who were nearest the windows that he did, and, moreover, that it was he who gave him the silver coin. These same witnesses, however, when pressed to identify the Duke, testified to a diamond crown and a purple robe, and so—?

One thing is certain, however, the incident served to reverse some of the honors of the occasion in a flash, and the very last became easily first in importance. A few who had come in carriages drove off disgruntled, and when the train was out of sight Becky Backslide and her baby held a reception on the railway-track, and some favored few were

allowed to handle the silver coin, and even to bite a taste out of a Russian peach bought in Philadelphia.

When some one proposed naming the baby for the Grand-Duke, and another caught it up, and presently a man threw up his cap and hurrahed for the "Gran'-Duke Alexis," the baby waved his pickle above his head and crowed his delight, and the deed was done. There was no one to suggest any special further name for the little fellow. His mother's present surname was obviously not of her own seeking, but had come to her with the baby, somehow, at the time of the preaching of the Reverend Brother Saul, of the Buckeye Conference.

The bestowal of a royal name is in itself suggestive of some ceremonial, and if John Henry Indigo Columbus might have made his way through life comfortably, with nothing as a fixitive beyond the maternal decree, even the unanimous voice of the village was deemed insufficient for the legal naming of Grand-Duke Alexis. It was imperative, so

said the wise ones, that such a name should be bestowed regularly in baptism.

Becky's adviser in all matters of import was a certain Squire Jackson, for whose family she washed. Now the old squire was a wag, and enjoyed nothing so much as a good joke, and when Becky went to him for advice in the present situation he was immensely interested, and bade her receive in all seriousness whatever the Church should offer her in the way of endorsement and confirmation of her son's royal name and title. It was something to the little mother to mollify an aggrieved congregation, and so she carried her babe up the aisle, and, obeying the squire's suggestion, had him registered as godson to Alexis of Russia.

For a whole month the mother kept the "Grand-Duke's dollar" as a sort of mascot, refusing to spend it even under some pressure of poverty.

The coin acquired in a way so out of the common was easily considered luck-money, a thing to hold against anything less than a

lure offering more than an adequate return in value. But it was precisely such a temptation as this that came about six weeks after the passage of the Duke.

Foreign missions have their innings even on Southern plantations, and the ways of such as labor in their behalf here are as varied as they are in more familiar fields. It was freely whispered in plantation circles that the beneficiaries of a certain transaction which cleared a comfortable sum of money for the cause were "not so foreign as Brother Marvin let on," but from his frank presentation of its business value to himself, one would be inclined to say that this was a scandal.

The Reverend Mr. Marvin, of Vermont, had come to the plantation at Chinkapin Turn several years before the war to serve as overseer. Being of an adaptable nature, he took readily to things Southern, so that when the war came and his employer, foreseeing disaster, offered to sell, he was glad to become purchaser of both lands and

slaves—to a comparatively small extent, it is true, as he was not a man of great means; but a few acres of cotton-lands and a handful of negroes went a long way as investments along the road to ruin when the war was over. The need that then seemed to Mr. Marvin most imperative in the conditions that confronted him was the one he humbly essayed to fill when he prefixed the "Reverend" to his name, and worked for the saving of the souls of such as had so recently eluded him in the body.

Marvin did many things for the upbuilding of the communities where his lots were cast, and there are yet several substantial edifices consecrated to divine uses which owe their being to his enterprise and devotion.

When he offered a house and lot at a public raffle for six hundred dollars, one-half to go through his hands to foreign missions, he frankly stated that this same property had been on the market for some time at two hundred and fifty dollars, and that in taking the first half of the new price he was asking

only the moderate sum of fifty dollars for conducting the lottery. Chances were on sale at a dollar each, payable either in money or trade. As a fact, most of them were paid for in potatoes and corn, and even cotton, weighed at the gin and charged to the owners at a fair retail price.

Marvin was not eloquent; he realized the salient points in a situation, and could utilize them with more skill than some of fairer speech. So ably did he handle this religious appeal in behalf of the heathen that before the raffle was finished not only had his people learned the words of "Greenland's Icy Mountains," as "lined out" in the altitudinous tones of the Green Mountains of Vermont, but many there were who could not lift up their voices to its stirring measure without shouting. To have fifty cents wisely invested both in heaven and on earth, with a prospect of fictitious returns from both quarters, was no small temptation to such as poor Becky Backslide, for instance, who realized herself doubly bankrupt.

Even though she followed her Lord afar off, Becky was by no means insensible to the crying needs of the unenlightened who bow down to gods of wood and stone; and more than that, it seemed to her that "a house an' land goin' at a dollar looked like a chance too p'intedly aimed at luck-money" for her to decline it. And so she dressed her baby in a fresh pink slip and took him up to the pastor's house, and putting the luck-piece in his hand, called for the magic list of numbers, and selecting that which he first touched with the coin, had Mr. Marvin write opposite it the full royal name, which was made legally good by a cross traced by the hand of the child held by his mother, and further directed by the guidance of the strong hand of Brother Marvin—in the presence of witnesses.

Of course the baby's number won the prize. How could it help it? One's first impulse is to say, of course *it didn't*, because most numbers that people know about don't win anything. But this is fallacious. To

such as have "secondary sight" and can read occult signs it will appear that Becky Backslide's baby was almost sure to win that house — as he did. Indeed, to prove this true, when it became known, before the raffle, that she had brought this little stray baby with the toppling name, and had entered him as competitor in the race through the instrumentality of the Duke's money, there were some who threatened to withdraw.

To Becky and her baby the lottery had a double meaning. In addition to its winning a roof for their heads, it brought them into tangible relationship with the Church. She was not a sensitive soul, or of great imagination, but it seemed to her that the angels must know about the little cabin in which, for a certain period at least, heaven held half-interest; and when she first set her baby down in its doorway, she looked upward through the trees and really wished that she were more respectable. The regret was only momentary, however, for her next thoughts were of a number of other people

who held up their heads—people of whom she knew things — and so when she first stood in her own door to greet a visitor, she bore herself as befitted a householder and mother to a duke. Not that she was at all "'boveish," to borrow the vernacular, but her hands rested on her slim hips in a confident pose that gave her an unequivocal "good-as-you-is" expression that was not to be gainsaid, and fixed her status at once in the community. It gives one a certain prestige even to own a front door. Poor Becky had been a back-door woman all her life.

One of her first acts after moving into her home was borrowing a dollar—which she was able to do without security on her abstract prosperity — and redeeming the magic "luck-piece." The coin was easily identified by various foreign marks, and its owner was pleased to return it, as he found that, although it was silver, it "wouldn't pass." Her feeling about the coin, though, was of another sort, and when she had re-

covered it she recklessly impaired its "passing value" still further by making a hole in it and tying it by a bit of string around her baby's neck. On this he cut his eye and stomach, and, for aught we know, his wisdom teeth; and, indeed, during many warm days of summer the necklaced coin was all that he wore that at all simulated a garment.

Duke's mother was of the slighter intelligences, and hence much given to convictions. Knowing few things, she "believed in" a great many. Signs, wonders, visions, and "experiences" were among the articles of her simple creed.

It had been shown her to her own satisfaction, by signs unequivocal, that her offspring was no common mortal. Had he not knocked fearlessly at the door—or window—of royalty, and been taken in and provided for? Had she not "by an' th'ough this distinguishment" been raised from a position below the ranks to be a person of *rank?*

She continued to work for the Jacksons,

and to the old squire belongs the credit of instructing her as to the conduct of princes of the blood; and although Becky was no fool, and she often laughed at the things the squire told her, and freely accused him of "makin' game" of her, she pondered in her heart upon the responsibility of bringing up her boy befitting the station of one "providentially set apart for favors" among his people.

First and foremost in her scheme for him there must be no work—not an uncommon ambition for a laboring American parent. With a home and a title and an education, he should be equipped for the life of leisure to which he was born. It was hard that she, too, liked leisure, and it was not exactly feasible for both, unless— There was the lucky coin! So long as it was in the family possession she felt that something unexpected might turn up, and yet she was not inclined to tempt Providence by investing it again. She had taken things as they came in life, with thanks. She had even

taken Duke that way in the beginning, as an unshared responsibility, and she had already her reward, in part. As to the future, she had no misgivings. She was a good laundress, and the spring water at her door was soft as dew. There were opulent folk living in town a mile or such a matter distant. There was the man who ostensibly owned the new railroad, and was buying land in its name, and the civil engineer who worked with several assistants along the line of the projected extension — and there were others. These smart-looking folk had families, and some of their children were of 'Lexie's size.

She always put clothes on the boy on Sundays, when she took him to church, even in summer-time, and as she had neither time nor inclination to keep up with the styles, there was nothing simpler than to use discretion in taking in washing.

When he was four or five years old, and the winter days were chill, he sometimes complained that his little bare legs were cold as he toddled beside his mother in the kilts

that were fully three inches above the short hose that came into the wash with them. This was a style of dress worn by young noblemen, so the squire assured her, and was a mark of nobility of a certain sort. This pleased her immensely, and she was glad to recall the fact that those who got glimpses of the Grand-Duke in the half-hour when his car waited at the station had seen only his head and shoulders, and no doubt if his legs could have been seen they would have been discovered to be bare. There were perquisites in her laundress's office, and after a year or so there were enough cast-off garments actually belonging to the little Duke for Becky to dress him from top to toe in what stood for the latest mode, and to walk down the main road with him on Sunday mornings, having no fear of the carriages she might encounter on the way, and again there were other Sundays when it seemed best to take a cut through the woods.

These last were, of course, the days of his high feather. Becky was herself a comely

little black girl, and during the years of Duke's childhood there was more than one lover who came and stood beside her and lifted her tubs while she washed at the spring under the trees. But she remained as truly a widow as she had ever been, and her boy grew up knowing no law beyond hers until his eighth year, when he entered the district school.

Duke was popular among the girls of his vicinity, and the boys liked him too—but with reservations. While they liked to come and swing on his gate—and they liked the taste of Becky's cookies, too — they were always conscious in a way of the dollar around his neck, even when it was covered, and it represented a certain superiority that was apt to assert itself under very slight provocation.

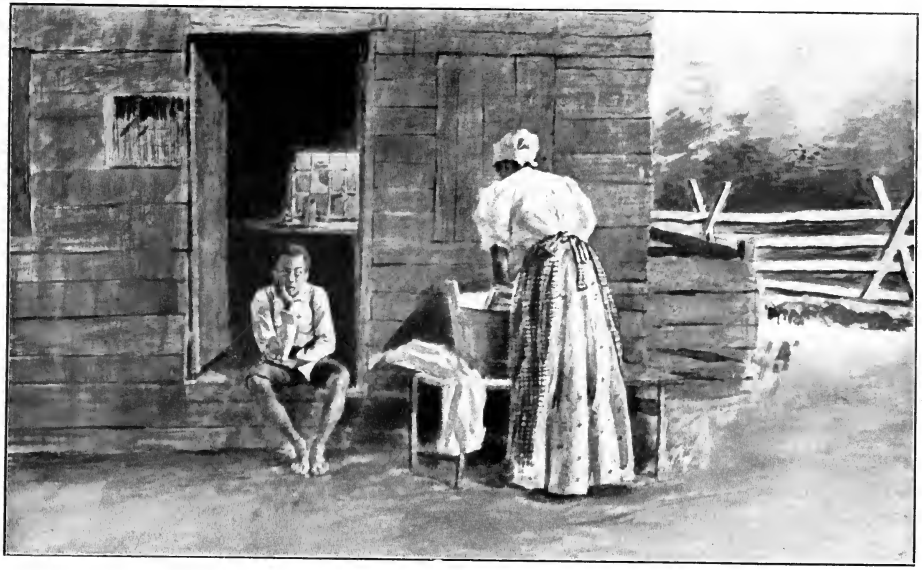
For instance, when on one occasion one of them spoke of the cabin as a house, Duke retorted, arrogantly: "House! What you callin' a house, I like to know? Dat's Chinkapin Castle — dat what it is. My god-daddy, de Gran'-Juke, gimme dat castle."

"Goddaddy! I say, goddaddy!" answered his companion. "I don't b'lieve you knows what goddaddies is. De Juke war'n't even heah when you was christened."

"Don't keer ef he warn't. Squire Jackson 'p'inted ole Uncle Sol to stan' 'sponserble for 'im all de samee. You ax de squire."

Of course this was final. Everybody respected what the squire said, and although the small cabin beyond the chinkapin hedge was never seriously referred to as a castle, there was a feeling in the popular mind that, as one old man contemptuously expressed it, "it mought spout a tower an' a cupalow any night."

Indeed, at one period of his callow youth it is a question whether a sudden apparition of battlements and towers emanating from his humble roof would have surprised its imaginative boy owner or not. He had learned many things at the squire's feet in the long summer evenings when he went to carry a message, to ask for an "extry allowance o' starch," or "a cake o' soap," or



"DUKE WAS AN ASKER OF STRANGE QUESTIONS"

"bag o' blue" beyond the ordinary. Duke was a dawdler and a stayer, a listener, an asker of strange questions. And his memory was good.

When he was as old as seventeen years he believed as truly as he believed his prayers that a man of his rank and station would have to remain a bachelor until such a time as he should be courted by the lady of his heart. Starting with the proposition, "the queen has to do the proposing," and arguing inversely that she whom he would marry would be in a manner his queen—a duchess being only one remove from her royal highness—the application of this etiquette of courts is apparent.

Had the boy been less amiable and good-looking than he was, and less magnetic, this in itself would have been enough to make him cordially hated. As it was, his sweethearts accepted it as they did the rest of his pretensions, as a silly joke that had a certain amount of truth back of it. Of course, there was truth somewhere, for there were the *house* and the *name*, and hanging over

Becky's mantel was a formidable-looking document framed in gilt and resplendent in its hanging of red cord and tassel. It was her first tax-receipt, and here any one who could read might see recorded the full royal "intitlemints," in the handwriting and with the great red seal of the court. The framing of this effective document was the suggestion of the squire, and in the expenditure of the dollar and sixty-five cents which it cost her Becky was quick to see a way to get even with certain of her acquaintances who had certificates of another sort in this place of honor in their cabins, a fashion dating from the memorable revival under the preaching of the Reverend Brother Saul Sanders, of the Buckeye Conference.

From the time he could remember, Alexis had had more girl than boy friends, and he was a little fellow when he began, as his mother fondly expressed it, "layin' down de law" to them.

"Yer know what yer got to be ef you marries me, don't yer? Yer got to be a

gran'-duchess—'ca'se dat's de law." So he would open fire, sitting upon his own gate-post, and addressing the half-dozen girls who either climbed beside him or played "jack-stones" on their dress skirts spread on the grass below.

"Purty-lookin' gran'-juke you is, I'll be bound," one would answer, while the rest set up a howl of derision.

"Well, I can't he'p it. I is one, all de samee," he would insist. "He laid his han' on my head an' passed it on—"

"Passed what on?"

"Why, de intitlemints, dat's what—de dukeship. An' all de high-an'-mighties in de car seen 'im do it, too."

"What high-an'-mighties? You mean to say de car was full o' jukes?"

"No, of co'se not. How is you talkin'? Dey warn't no jukes in de car but *jes me an' de yether Juke*."

At this there would be a chorus:

"Look at de gran'-juke—barefeeted, an' a ole—"

"I don' keer ef my hat is ole an' tore. I knows good tobacker when I sees it—an' I loves a dorg an' a gun—an' I likes to set down an' talk, an' tell jokes, an' spit. All dem is jukish ways de world over—you ax de squire." And seeing that no one opposed him, he would add: "Jukes don't go by clo'es, nohow. *You* couldn't *nair one* be dressed up into a juke, ur a gran'-duchess neither, an' nobody couldn't strip me out o' my title. Don' keer ef I stan's up in my bare skin, I's a gran'-juke, an' don't you forgit it." And with this milord would turn a somersault over the head of any one within range, and seeing her dodge, he would roll over on the grass and howl with laughter.

Alexis had been beautiful from his birth, and at eighteen he was a young Apollo, as light and graceful as a fawn, and about as care-free and irresponsible. True, there had been times when he had wept copiously and loudly beneath the chastening rod of the fond mother, who had not hesitated to perform her full double parental duty so far as she

knew it. Nor did she hesitate at language, under provocation. There were occasions when "mammy's boy" answered with a quicker step than was his wont such appellations as "imp o' darkness," and "black buzzard," and even another that is not pretty enough to write. The mother part of her was so tender to her offspring, however, that she turned such odious epithets to the account of the abstract *pater*—as, for instance, when, on one occasion, she was overheard to exclaim, as she stood fluting a little dress for him to wear, "You nee'n't to think, 'ca'se I'm a-standin' up *a-mammyin'* yer wid dis flutin'-machine, dat I won't come over dah an' *daddy yer over de head wid dis flat-iron* ef you don't quit yo' foolin'." It is hard to be mother and father too to a boy, and considering that for the father part she had to project herself, she did fairly well.

But one day Becky laid her slim little body down on her bed, and took both herself and her boy by surprise by quietly dying. She had not even known herself ill until the day

previous, and not very ill until about an hour before it was all over, when she called her boy to her, and held his hand, and told him several things. She told him, for one thing, that she thought more of him than she had ever let on; and when she saw that this depressed him, she changed the subject, and mentioned that Mis' Trimble owed for three weeks' washing, and there was a dollar and forty-five cents in the clock; and then she admonished him to "keep on bein' a good boy," and to "go ax de squire whenever he was unsettled in his mind about anything"; and she added, in a whisper, "Don't never ac' low-down about nothin', an' *don't forgit who you is!*" Then, feeling herself failing, she essayed to say something else and couldn't; and Alexis, seeing a change, ran with all his might and called a neighbor, and when he presently returned with three women there was no one in the cabin. That which had seemed to be his mother a few minutes before looked remote and awful to him, and he ran from it to the woods, and

cried aloud to God that his mammy was "dead, dead, *dead*, DEAD, DEAD!" And he rolled in the fallen leaves and tore his hair; and then, seeing some ripe berries near, he gathered them, sobbing, and ate them greedily, not knowing what he did until a mocking-bird on a limb above his head began to sing, when he remembered, and screamed to him to shut his mouth, and told him, as he had told God, that his mammy was dead. And then he ran home, and stood outside the door and watched the strange movements of the women as they covered the furniture with sheets, and said things with pulpit words in them, such as "howsoever," and "wherefore," and "springeth up," and "amen." And he knew that he was alone in the world.

The Church "Society for the Promotion of Widows an' Orphans," to which she had belonged, gave Becky as fine a funeral as was available. One of its proudest properties was a second-hand hearse and two sets of "plumes," black for the married, and white for such as died in childhood or single. It

was deemed fitting to use two of each on this occasion, and the boy, seeing in the white a tribute to his mother's youth and fairer qualities, took pride in the mixed emblems.

When he sat beside the Reverend Mr. Marvin in the buggy, behind the hearse, and saw the procession of women following in poke-bonnets and shoulder-capes, and the men with crape bows upon their sleeves, it seemed for a moment as if the hour of his triumph had come, and he said to Mr. Marvin, "Ef mammy could only 'a' lived to see all dis, wouldn't she 'a' been proud?" And Mr. Marvin assured him that she did see it, and that she saw him at that minute, and Duke glanced nervously over his shoulder and shuddered.

There was only one of Duke's young companions who did not come to the funeral. Her name was Talula Malinda, and she worked in the field. Talula and Alexis had been companions all their lives, and she was the one girl whom he knew of whom he was afraid. Perhaps she was the only one who

did not in a manner fear him. She had quarrelled with him, and fought for him, and made fun of him, and despised him, and dearly loved him ever since she could remember. Talula was a dimpled maid two years his junior, of a color suggesting bell-copper at its richest, and with just enough kink in her hair to carry a glint adown the single braid that fell to her waist. Her father, albeit he was a "slave negro," was half Indian, and in his family there were traditions of tribal distinction that were strong enough to make him so poor a slave that he had spent more than half his time in hiding in the cane-brakes until after the emancipation, when he settled down with his former owners and served them devotedly all his life. If it was his African wife who gave the little daughter Talula her temperament, there was something of the spirit of her father in the girl that distinguished her even more than the Indian name, "Tuckapaw Lou," by which she was familiarly known—the Attakapas being her grandfather's tribe.

When she heard of Becky's death and saw the women running, she stole away to the woods and remained all day. The women were going from house to house talking about it, she knew, and she feared some one would look at her, and she could not stand it. And when, during the week following, she knew that the girls were going over to Alexis's cabin and carrying baskets of cakes and pies, and that they sat in his door and talked to him, she never went near there; but one dark night she slipped out when her mother was in bed, and put a note under his door, and the note said she was sorry his mother was dead, but for him not to be a fool because all the girls brought him cakes, but to go in the field and work. This made Duke very angry, and as soon as he read it he put on his best clothes—which were not his at all, but a young lawyer's for whom his mother had washed—and proceeded to call upon a girl whom he knew Talula did not like, and they walked down the road together; but he did not tell her about the note.

"DUKE HAD NEVER BEEN SO WELL DRESSED"

Then, the next thing Talula heard was that Aunt Ettie Dolittle and her girl Miami had moved into Duke's cabin, and were washing at Becky's spring, and the people said that he and Miami were "keepin' company." Then somebody told her that "'Lexius had p'intedly set out to marry," and had announced himself as "open to proposals," which last was true and seemed important, though he had done the same many a time.

In a week or two it really appeared as if poor Becky had been forgotten. Duke had never been so well dressed—that is, not on week-days. The fact is, he had arranged with all his mother's customers who were what he called "my sized men" to let Aunt Ettie retain their washing, and for a short time Ettie felt a sort of delicacy in interfering with his use of it. But there soon arrived a day of reckoning, and milord was constrained to return to first principles, and to take his chances in getting such "loans" from his tenant's customers as she saw fit to accord him for special occasions. Nor was

this his only trouble. No man of society can get along smoothly without any money. It has been done on next to none, but Duke had not any. The promising arrangement which afforded him board and washing, and left him absolutely free to come and go, was found to be imperfect. He had never carried money in his pocket, and it had not occurred to him that he would need any. His first shock was the presentation of his tax-bill. Of course he knew about the taxes, but somehow, even while he lived with the framed first receipt ever in view, he forgot all about them. And then his shoes wore out, and no one offered him a good second-hand pair. His mother had seen to all these small matters, and he had never inquired particularly how she did it. He got shoes by trading some chickens at the store, and then he tried to trade a fighting-rooster and two "frying-sizes" for his taxes, which amounted to two dollars and thirty-five cents, but he found they would not take trade in the court-house; but he succeeded in selling these chick-

ens and a half-dozen young hens for ten cents more than his taxes, and he came home perfectly happy, with a bottle of ginger-pop inside his person and a wad of chewing-gum in his mouth. And this was the beginning of a new trouble. A taste of money is like a taste of blood. In a week Duke had sold all his chickens and the two geese and the guineas, and had treated the girls to ginger-pop and root-beer and chewing-gum, and he owed the candy man ten cents, with no prospect of paying it. He wanted to pay it, and even tried to sell the cat to the new lady at the station; but she didn't want any cat—and he hadn't the face to offer it to any one else—and then he began to grow discontented and morbid. And in his extremity he set out to see the squire. The old man had missed the boy since his mother's death. He had seen him only at a distance several times, when he had appeared fine and important; and the contrast as he slunk in now was so great that somehow he could not quite help laughing.

Alexis wore one of his mother's old wrappers, only as a shirt, it is true, but the disposition of its length within a pair of loose trousers gave his body a bulk that was grotesquely in contrast with his slender limbs. The squire gave him a warm greeting, though, and did not in any way refer to his sending the buggy on the day of the funeral —a courtesy that had not been acknowledged. The visit was a comfort to the boy in many ways, and was the renewal of an old and valued intimacy.

The squire was really a kindly man, and he pitied the poor fellow, and, leading him from one confidence to another, he soon understood pretty well the chief trials of the situation. Of course there were a few things the boy did not tell. He didn't tell about the dime he owed at the candy-store, or how he had managed about his toilet, but he did not hesitate to complain that his house was "always so full of gabblin' women and sudsy wash-tubs that he had no peace"; "that half the time he couldn't find a dry

place to set in"; that he could not even get them to "keep up with his clothes"; and that he didn't have "any say-so about anything in his own house any more than if he was a stranger," and he was "mighty tired of it."

When he went home the squire was injudicious enough to give him a quarter, which, somehow, made him go home the long way rather than pass the candy-shop.

Although Duke was entering upon a period of sad trials, there were merry hours in his life now, as of old, and when he walked among the girls and announced with a swagger, "Ef any gal wants to be de gran'-duchess, now is 'er chance to step up an' put de fatal question," he felt almost as happy as ever. But in his heart there was a secret chamber of unrest. He continued to be angry with Talula, and he wanted her to know it; but it fretted him to see her pass down the road day after day without turning her head, and often attended by a young fellow he hated — just for this. And yet

he did not know how to help matters unless he should "'umble himself" to her, which he would never do "for any gal."

And so time went on. Christmas came, and the girls sent him numerous things; and Miami gave him a set of underwear that she had made for him with her own hands. There were good reasons why the gift should have been a welcome one, but yet he resented it. It seemed a covert proposal of marriage from the girl who was already installed in his mother's room, and whose name was being constantly coupled with his. He wore the things, however; but the home bid sent him out visiting other girls oftener than he had done. He had chafed under so many things that he was half glad when the final row came that left him tenantless and alone. "You ain't de on'y goose in de puddle, nohow," he had called angrily to Aunt Ettie as she went out—a parting shot that seemed to hold a truth, for in exactly three days another had taken her place on even more generous terms. But very soon there was a

second rupture, and a third family came in, and erelong a fourth. Things seemed to grow worse with each change, until, in almost despair, Duke went again to the squire and told him all there was to tell—excepting, of course, about Talula. Her name he never mentioned to a human soul.

The squire was thoughtful for a while over the boy's evident dilemma, and then he asked him bluntly why he did not pick out a nice girl and get married. But he instantly saw his mistake. Duke shook his head. "No, no," he protested; "de gals is th'owed out so many hints right an' left dat dey got me clair disgusted; an' I ain't no marryin' man, nohow."

This was final, at least for the present. The squire leaned back in his chair and whistled for some minutes before he ventured another suggestion. But presently he said, tentatively: "Suppose you raffle your house again, Duke, and buy yourself a horse and wagon, and go into the express business? There is something of

the sort needed, and no one has taken it up. Get old man Marvin to undertake the raffle again."

The joy that overspread the boy's face as the full meaning of the words reached him was really pathetic. It "struck him all of a heap," so he said, and "tickled his funny-bone," and gave him the "dry grins," and made him "forgit all his troubles."

He did not sleep that night. To own a horse and drive him, "wid no boss to boss him," had long been Duke's idea of earthly bliss. It is true he had not contemplated it as a means of living, but if the living came as a perquisite in his lordly pursuit of pleasure, so much the better. The prospect fired his imagination, and he realized afresh his rank and "intitlemints" as he had not done since his mother's funeral.

Duke felt pretty blue when the time came and he knew his home was to pass from him. He had not realized how much of his conscious prestige it represented. He had secret-

ly laid the Duke's coin on a number with his eyes closed, and written his name beneath the spot, hoping luck might favor him again; but there was a unanimous protest, and he had to give it up, which he insists to this day was most unfair.

Every girl on the plantation had a chance in the drawing, and most of them had said little flirtatious things about what they would do if they won it. Several had frankly declared that in case they should be so lucky they would make Duke do the proposing, to which he had declared himself "only waiting." "Indeed," said he, "I 'ain't got no notion o' wastin' myse'f by sayin' yas to a gal befo' I see which way the cat gwine jump!"

It is fun to be young.

The drawing was a semi-social affair. All the young people had on shoes, and there were cake and pink lemonade passed round, and everybody seemed happy.

Somehow it had not occurred to Duke that Talula might be there. Her name had not

appeared on the list. But here she was, and at the calling of "Sarah Jane Brown," who but she should step forward, looking like a dahlia, and draw a slip from the hat? She came again in a moment, answering to another name this time, and again to another, each time drawing a blank and moving back demurely to her place. When fifty numbers had been drawn, and she had been up five times, Duke began to feel very strange. She had never looked so beautiful or appeared so utterly hateful to him in her life. He knew she had always been queer and unlike the other girls, but he had never thought her mean. Now he saw her *as she was*. She wanted his house, and he despised her for it. There were several persons present whom he had objected to personally as possible owners of his "estate," but in the excitement of his discovery he forgot all about them. There was only one person on earth whom he would die rather than have win it, and that was the radiant Talula—Talula, who, at his first misfortune, had wanted to make a work-

ing-man of him; Talula, whose smile he had seen in his dreams for a year, and whom he had tried in vain to forget.

Even while he writhed in the new realization of her she was up at the hat, drawing again, and presently again, and, after eight others, here she was once more; and this time, when she unfolded the little paper, there was a stir, and every one was shouting "Tuckapaw Lou!" and he saw her "turn every color an' trimble," and he knew she had won. He stood dazed, as one riveted to the spot, until he saw her go into the parlor with Mr. Marvin to get the deed—he had already signed his relinquishment—and then, feeling that he had "stood all he could," he said he was "sick," and went home "before it was out." When the family—that is to say, his tenant—came home, they called to see if he was in bed, and he answered them from the loft.

Now that the house was no longer his and he had money in his pocket, there was no reason to have them remain. The terms

of the sale gave him possession until the 1st of January, and he longed for a little peace and quiet. He needed more room to hate Talula in as she ought to be hated. He could not half despise her among the wash-tubs and women — the chattering, flippant women whose jokes, which had seemed only silly the day before, were profanity to him now. And so he asked them to go.

The few weeks while he was alone in his little cabin were the most memorable in his life. He had suddenly come into his hitherto undeveloped manhood, jolted into it as many another has been by the love of a distracting woman. To the meagre fellow, unused to cope with anything, had come the double tragedy of love and hate, back to back but inseparable, a combination that has torn stronger ones asunder. To his distorted vision Talula's conduct was a perfidious betrayal which had robbed him of home and happiness. Even her entering the list under assumed names seemed a part of her treachery as he thought it over. And yet, as he re-

called her standing there that night, he knew that he loved her in spite of all. No doubt she would marry his odious rival now—the rival whom he had never opposed. He was glad that he had never given her that much satisfaction. Of course they would come here to live. Their marriage-certificate would supplant the tax-receipt in the place over the mantel.

Duke was pretty miserable.

Instead of buying his horse and wagon, as he expected to do, he hid his money and sat in his cabin, and thought—for the first time in his life—thought out a course for himself. There was no adviser possible now, no, not even God. He might come to that, but not yet. His first impulse was to start out and "do some killin'"; but when he thought it over he hardly knew whom to kill first, and so he decided against that. He would go away. Yes, he would go—he would go to Russia and see his namesake and godfather. Maybe the Grand-Duke would let him drive the royal coach. Duke knew about "royal

coaches," and "retinues," and "courtiers." Of course the Duke might not recognize him, after so long, but he would show him the dollar and the tax-receipt.

The travelling scheme opened a new world to the boy, but it was a lonely one and drear. He did not go with the girls these last days. He couldn't. He had not even been to see the squire in the fortnight that had passed since the drawing. Of course he would go soon—when all his plans were laid—but he had to get himself together before he could talk to anybody.

As he sat alone in the long winter evenings he spread his little school atlas upon the table, and studied the map of Russia, wondering just where the Duke's castle might be. He was sorry to find that he could not go from America to Russia without getting out of the book and into it again, and this seemed to indicate that he would have to change boats. He would take the geography over and get the squire to explain all about it—some evening, soon. He quite

longed to be gone, and yet he hesitated to go. He would wait till after Christmas, and tell him then. He didn't want any talk, and there would be lots of excitement at Christmas, anyway. He had half a notion not to tell anybody but the squire where he was going. Yes, he would, too. Talula should hear it—from everybody. When she realized that he had gone to "his own title-country" maybe she wouldn't be quite so "bigoty" and "'boveish," in the cabin he had discarded for a palace.

Duke was pretty lively on Christmas Eve for a broken-hearted fellow, but he couldn't help it. The girls had prepared so many funny surprises for him, and when they would come in giggling groups of twos and threes, leaving their gifts, he really loved them again—for the moment—and he promised them all that he would "be sho' to turn up at de dance, later on."

But as the evening wore away he did not feel inclined to go. Talula might be there. She probably would be, "jest to show

off," and he didn't want to lay eyes on her.

It was after eleven o'clock, and he still heard the notes of the string band in the wind, but they held no invitation for him. He was nodding sleepily over the map of Russia when suddenly his door-latch clicked. He turned, half asleep, to see Talula herself standing in the doorway. At first wholly dazed, he believed that he saw a vision, but when she came and stood before him, and he heard her voice, he knew that the supreme moment of his life had arrived. He tried to stand up, but could not, and then she bade him "set still," and she sat down. Then she drew from her pocket a long envelope, which Duke instantly recognized. It contained the deed of the cabin.

"I reckon you's surprised to see me here, 'Lexius," she began, looking into the fire as she spoke; "but I ain't gwine to keep you long. I jes brung you dis title-deed back. I would 'a' fetched it befo', but I 'lowed dat Chris'mus was so close-t I'd wait."

"ALEXIS LAID HIS HAND UPON HER ARM"

She paused here, and Duke looked straight into her eyes, but he said nothing. He was utterly in the dark as to her meaning. But she resumed in a moment, slowly:

"Of co'se you won't min' payin' me—"

But here he interrupted her.

"I didn't sell my prop'ty to buy it back ag'in, Miss Lou!" He had never called her Miss before, and he saw that it stung her, and he repeated it:

"I say, Miss Lou, ef I had 'a' been projec'in' to—to *buy*, I wouldn't 'a' *sol' out*. I's tired o' dis neighborhood, an' I's gwine travellin', an' so you'll haf to fin' another purchaser fur yo' investiture. I sho' is rej'iced to see dat you is got a eye for speculation. I don't doubt dat you kin make consider'ble on dis house an' lan'. It couldn't 'a' cost you mo' 'n ten or twelve dollars, even countin' all dem po'-white names you entered on, an' it has netted three hund'ed dollars—an' I sho' wush you joy."

The girl listened till he was through, but she did not quail.

"I put nineteen dollars in it," she answered, evenly. "I would 'a' put mo' ef I'd 'a' had it, an' de amount I expected you to pay me was jes exac'ly nineteen dollars—no mo', no less. Ef I had 'a' started to make money out o' de trade, I wouldn't 'a' come Christmus. You know I don't want yo' house, 'Lexius. I'd *give* you de nineteen dollars, on'y I don't want to 'umble you. I jes took all de chances I could so as to try to keep some o' dem fool cake-makin' gals from winnin' it—dat's all. But, of co'se, ef you say you don't want it—"

She rose to her feet, but Alexis laid his hand upon her arm.

"Talula," he cried, "hush! Set down!" And when she obeyed him mutely, he leaned forward and seized her hand.

It was after midnight when Duke and Talula started out in the moonlight to the dance, hand in hand.

As they passed out the gate, Duke happened to glance over his shoulder. As he did

so there was a flare of light in his window, and he started back in alarm, but Talula held him fast.

"Come along, boy!" she cried; "dey ain't nothin' de matter. Hit's jes dat ole title-deed I laid on de live coals."

THE END

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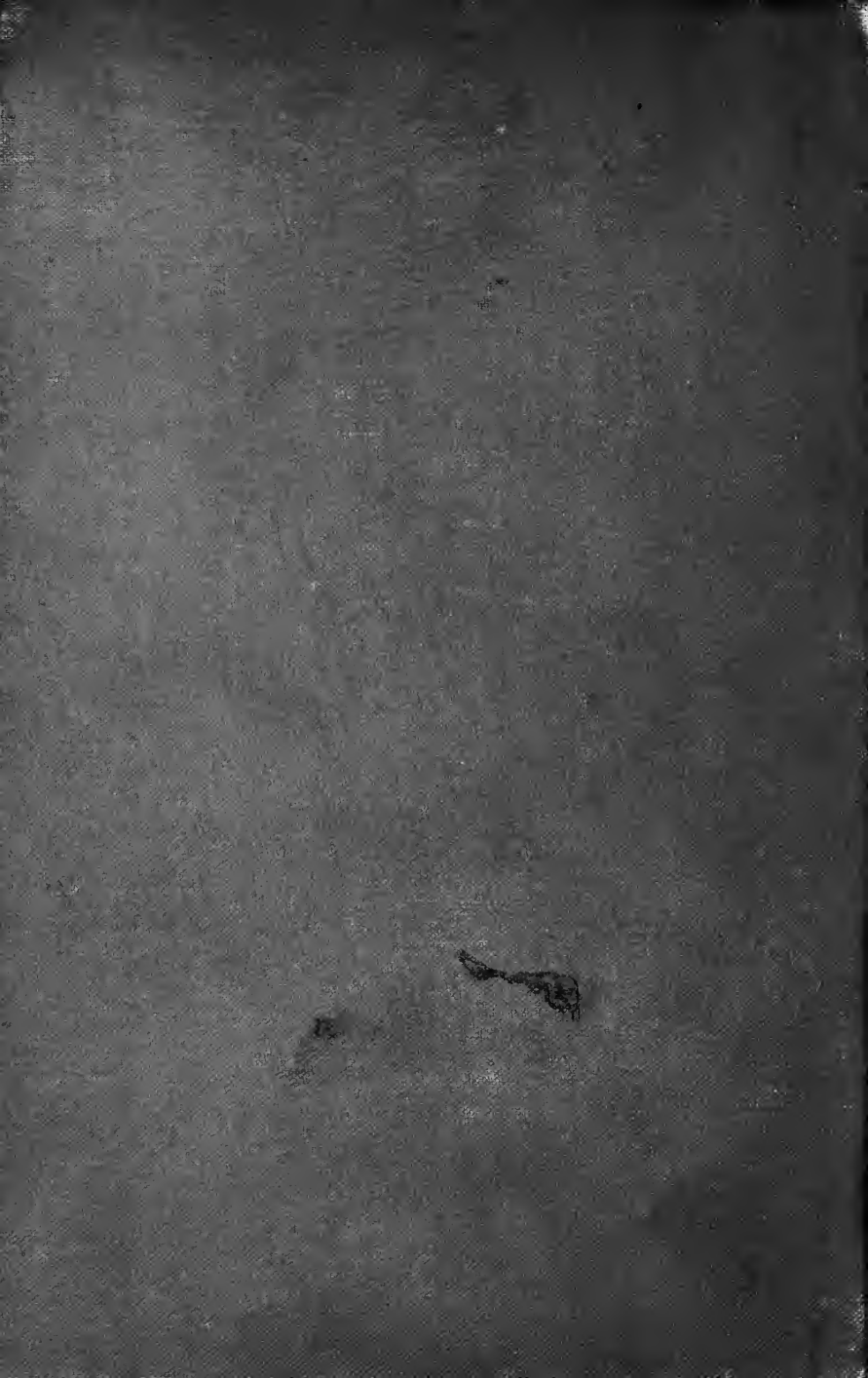
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